

A
LEGAL
PRACTITIONER

CHRISTIAN
TEARLE

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BEING CERTAIN OF MY OWN
EXPERIENCES

BY
CHRISTIAN TEARLE

AUTHOR OF
“THE VICE-CHANCELLOR’S WARD,” “OLD MR. LOVELACE”
ETC.

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TOMMY MURCHISON'S HERITAGE

CHAPTER I

"I SAY! This is devilish unlucky," grumbled old Puseley, my partner, as he came shuffling into my room with an open letter in his hand. "Young Murchison's coming to see me to-morrow, and I don't want to be here."

"Who is he?"

"He's the infant in Peters and Woodhouse, the old Chancery suit I was telling you about the other day."

"It's so particularly inconvenient," he went on, with another irritable glance at the letter; "I've promised my friend Stockley to go fishing with the club to-morrow. He won't like it if I cry off."

"But why not wire and say you won't be here?"

"Wouldn't it seem like neglecting business? I shouldn't care to give the boy that impression."

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I had not made my suggestion in good faith, so, with an inward smile, I let this virtuous answer pass. I knew, only too well, that if there had been nothing more in the wind than the day's fishing, my partner would not have troubled to consult me; he would have merely left word that when the boy presented himself, he was to be told that unfortunately, Mr. Puseley had been called out of town, and could not be back until the morrow.

Whether in my partner's younger days, when, presumably, his eyes were not red and watery, nor his hands all tremulous, he had conducted his business after this fashion, I do not know. He was long past his meridian when I came across him; and then his ways were such that our partnership had not been in existence for many days before I discovered what a bad bargain I had made.

"I suppose *you* couldn't see him," he resumed. "I'd make a point of being here myself if I wasn't a little poorly. I feel as if I wanted a day in the fresh air. I haven't felt at all the thing lately."

He said this in tones vibrating with self-pity, and he followed it up by a cough and an uneasy glance into my face.

I managed to keep back a smile, though his plea for a day in the fresh air was enough to make a cat laugh. The old gentleman and his cronies of the fishing-club were a survival of a race unknown to the present generation—the cockney

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sportsmen of Cruikshank and Seymour. The fishing-ground was at Ware, hard by an old-fashioned inn; and unless such accounts as I had received of the club's proceedings were purely malicious, the only fresh air which could visit these patriarchs of the angle was that which blew in upon them through the parlour window.

“What's the boy coming about?”

“He wants to be married.”

“How old is he?” I demanded, in some astonishment.

“His uncle—that's his guardian, you know—says he's eighteen. I've got his letter here—no, I haven't; but I'll find it for you. He wrote to his uncle—cool as a cucumber; you never saw such a letter from a boy! Hee-hee-hee!”

“What's he got?”

“I think it's about two hundred a year, but, of course, he can't touch it till he's of age. But you haven't heard the cream of the joke—the girl's a cashier in a tooth factory, a month or two older than himself.”

“What are his people?”

“I forget what his father was. His uncle Thomas—that's our client, the guardian, you know; I haven't come across his other relatives—he's a parson. The Reverend Thomas don't care what the boy does—I doubt if he's ever seen him—but he sent the letter on to me, and told me to put my

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foot on it, once for all. He knows the Court wouldn't approve of it."

"And what did you do?"

"Oh, I wrote to the young scamp, the day before yesterday—a pretty strong letter it was!—threatening to apply for an injunction against the girl, if he didn't promise to give her up, and telling him what would happen if the injunction was broken. The letter's in the letter-book; you must have a look at it. Now he's written that he's coming here to see me, to-morrow. By-the-by, if anything's got to be done in the suit, perhaps you'd better see to it. I know you like Chancery work better than anything."

The ancient threw this out carelessly, and with the air of one, who confers a favour; but having shot his bolt, his confidence failed him, and he broke off to watch my face.

Possibly a certain proverb about the last straw was in his mind; for he was a singularly obtuse old gentleman, even when in full command of his faculties. Had he been otherwise, he would have known how ready I was to relieve him, not only of *Peters v. Woodhouse*, but of every other poor, fluttering remnant of what had once been a fine practice.

"I'll see the boy," said I. "Where's he coming from?"

"He's reading with a parson named Webb, just outside Cambridge—reading for the Church, you

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know. Bless my soul!—what's the name of the place? Never mind!—you'll find it on my letter. Catch me writing to any one without putting his address at the end! Matter of record, you know! The young chap's going to Cambridge in a few months. Don't bother the uncle if you can help it. He won't care what happens, so long as there's no trouble with the Court."

"I suppose you wish me to act as I think best?"

"Oh yes! By all means! But don't hesitate to consult me if you feel in any difficulty. Two heads are better than one, you know! That's what the haircutter said. Hee-hee-hee!"

The old gentleman began to edge towards the door as he uttered this witticism. Now that he had succeeded in his diplomacy, he was all anxiety to shuffle off.

I did not mean to let him escape before I had obtained some further particulars, but luck was against me. I was called away for a moment, and on my return I found that the bird had flown. His own room was empty, and when I looked into it again, two or three hours later, he was still absent. "Mr. Puseley went to the City just before one, sir. He couldn't say when he'd be back," was all that Peacock, who in those days acted as our universal clerk, could tell me. This meant that my partner had betaken himself to his accustomed seat in the

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Cheshire Cheese, and was probably, at that moment, in the enjoyment of his second or third "go of rack." Gray's Inn would see nothing more of him until eleven or twelve o'clock of the next day but one.

CHAPTER II

WHEN the infant in *Peters v. Woodhouse* was shown into my sanctum, there was something distinctly bellicose in his aspect. He looked surprised and a little disappointed when he saw that he had a stranger to deal with.

"I thought I was to see Mr. Puseley," he said, stiffly.

"My senior partner has been called out of town. He has asked me to see you."

"When is he coming back?" The tone of the question suggested that Mr. Oliver Hill Murchison had a bone to pick with somebody, and was anxious to set about it as soon as possible. His next remark put the matter beyond all doubt.

"It's no good my seeing you. I've come about a letter Mr. Puseley wrote me. It's a letter that I must discuss with him. I'm very sore about it."

There was indignation in his tone and manner, and he flushed up a little when he mentioned the letter, but there was nothing bumptious or theatrical about him. Nor was there any wilful courtesy towards myself. He had come to see Mr. Puseley,

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and he had, no doubt, prepared himself to open the conversation with that gentleman in good set terms. In the first flush of his disappointment at being confronted with some one else, the boy had expressed himself bluntly, but in such a way as to make it plain to any person of ordinary intelligence that he meant no harm.

"If I'd known that you were anxious to see Mr. Puseley, I wouldn't have agreed to take his place," said I, gravely. "The truth is, he feels he isn't growing younger, and he has asked me to take over your Chancery suit altogether."

"But *he* wrote the letter: I know his writing."

"Oh yes! It was only yesterday he spoke to me about the suit. All I know about the letter is that it was written upon your guardian's instructions. As a matter of fact, I haven't seen it."

The truth was, I had searched for the press-copy in vain. My partner, in his haste, had sent the letter off uncopied, and I had made an equally fruitless search for the uncle's letter and its enclosure.

Oliver seemed to find matter for reflection in the new aspect of things. As he stood scrutinizing me, with blue eyes under a broad forehead and a mop of dark hair, a well-built, well-dressed youth, who looked older than his years, I felt pretty sure that, burning though he was, to execute vengeance upon the scribe who had so incensed him, the prospect of

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seeing that individual no more was not without its compensations.

"Hadn't you better sit down and tell me what you have to complain of," said I, dropping into my chair. "Let us try to understand one another! What was wrong with the letter?"

"It was so—so *vulgar*," he grumbled, as he took a seat. "He's only a silly old ass; but he ought to know how to behave himself."

"He may have written it in a hurry," I pleaded.

"He *may* have written it in the Cheshire Cheese; but that doesn't make it any better," was the prompt and unexpected retort.

"Written it in the Cheshire Cheese!" I echoed, staring hard at the visitor.

His eyes twinkled as they met mine, but he answered nothing.

"What was the letter?" said I, suppressing a strong inclination to laugh.

"This was what happened. I fell in love with a young lady. Well, I wrote to my uncle: he's my guardian, though I've never seen him. I wrote and told him. I wrote to him because he was my guardian, and I knew he was entitled to be consulted. And besides, he's my uncle as well as my guardian —my only uncle too. It isn't usual to go and get engaged without telling your family—unless you happen to be ashamed of the lady."

The boy had been speaking without the least

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self-consciousness; but his colour had risen, and as he made this reservation, he looked straight at me with a fire in his eye and a tightening of the lips, which told, more eloquently than words, how eager he was to break a lance in honour of his lady with any one, who dared to suspect him of being ashamed of her.

"I wrote to my uncle on a family matter, as a gentleman to a gentleman, and the only answer I get is Mr. Puseley's letter," he went on, in hot anger. "It's shameful; it isn't even decent! I don't mind confessing that it's wounded me very much. I'm not a child to be scolded without cause; and, even if I was, why should he bring the lady into it? I meant to ask him how he would have liked it if she had been one of his daughters——"

"But he hasn't got a daughter—he hasn't any children."

I slipped this in, because I was anxious to bring matters down to a lower level; and the *Oh!* with which it was received, sounded like a somewhat grudging acknowledgment that, in the circumstances, an appeal to Puseley's feelings as a father might possibly have missed fire a little.

"You haven't told me yet what the letter said," I remarked.

"It began by saying that my uncle was much distressed at hearing that I had entangled myself with an individual, whose social position, apart

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altogether from my own age, made any suggestion of marriage wholly impracticable. That was pretty good! ‘Entangled myself,’ indeed!” The boy uttered a snort of indignation as he shot this forth.

“But that was no imputation upon the young lady.”

“I haven’t got to that. That came near the end of the letter, when he said that unless the affair—‘the affair,’ he called it!—was brought to an immediate end, the young person would find that her proposed alliance with a ward of Court of a social position so much higher than her own, would involve her in consequences more serious than she dreamed of, and he wound up by saying that in her interest, he must ask me to warn her and her parents that if there was any attempt to hold me to any foolish promise, which I might have given, it would be my uncle’s painful duty to at once seek the intervention of the Court, and that in the event of the Court’s order to break off all communication being disobeyed, the party most to blame would find herself committed to prison. And, oh, I’ve forgotten something! He had the audacity to regret having to ask me to do this, but as he didn’t know the other party’s address, and therefore could not communicate with her direct, he had no alternative. If he *had* written to her, I’d have broken every bone in his body.”

This last was sound and fury signifying nothing, for Puseley was a little old man, and he was shaky

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on his pins. The young athlete before me would as soon have struck a child.

"We won't discuss the form of the letter," said I. "Let's put that on one side. Don't forget, though, that it was out of the question for your guardian to sanction a marriage without the leave of the Court."

"Then why couldn't Mr. Puseley say so, without suggesting that I was the victim of some sort of conspiracy?"

I thought it advisable to dodge this question.

"Your engagement must have come as a great surprise," said I.

"But I wasn't engaged—not then."

"Not then?"

"But I am now. What could I do when I got such a letter, but see her, and put things on a right footing?"

"And you got engaged?"

"Yes; and I came here to let Mr. Puseley know—to let him know how his letter had worked. Of course, I didn't say anything to her about his threats. I meant to tell him that too."

"But what will the Court say?" said I, sore perplexed.

"What is there for the Court to interfere about? Mr. Puseley asked me to promise not to hold any further communication with—with the lady. I'll do that; I'll give my word of honour. It's only till

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I'm twenty-one, of course. I can do what I like after that."

"And did you get engaged upon that understanding?"

This was no business of mine, but I was so surprised that the question slipped out unawares.

"She wouldn't have taken me on any other terms; even then, she was very unwilling—but I needn't go into that."

"You will be of age in three years," said I, after a silence.

The boy nodded. "Rather less than that; thank goodness! I was eighteen five weeks ago—on the fourteenth of May. It is a long time though. But we'll worry through it somehow." Now that he had freed his mind by setting forth his wrongs he was growing more cordial.

There was something so irresistibly winning in the simplicity with which he had referred to the engagement and the preposterous understanding accompanying it, that I felt a strong desire to make things pleasant for him. It was, therefore, a relief to feel that one was not called upon to say anything disheartening just then. The promise which he had given was ample for present purposes; and though there was a difficulty looming in the immediate future, it would be time enough to consider that after he had gone, and I must then try to devise

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some scheme for putting matters on a secure footing without wounding him.

These thoughts passed through my mind as we sat looking at one another across my table, and in their train came a vague curiosity to learn something of the girl, who had promised to marry him on the understanding that they were to break off all communication for three years. He had said that even on these terms, she had accepted him unwillingly. That "even" was the puzzle. I began to wish that her swain had not pulled up so abruptly when he answered the question, which I ought not to have asked. "Boy and girl engagements are, at best, only foolishness," whispered common sense, "and he's eighteen, and has two hundred a year." I paid due heed to the whisper, but, remembering the "even," it was with something like a pang that I trod my sentimentalities under foot.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the boy.

"I'm sure your uncle will accept your promise. I dare say there will be some details to be arranged; but I can see you again after he's been consulted."

"And need there be any application to the Court?" Young Murchison asked this question with a half-smile.

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," said I, smiling in return.

"Was the old chap gassing when he made that threat about imprisonment? There's no reason why

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you shouldn't tell me; is there?" The indignant lover of a few minutes before was all boy as he said this.

"Do you think it's safe to go back to that letter?"

"I should like to know."

"Well, I'm not sure of the practice; but my impression is that the Court would proceed against the young lady's father, not against her."

"Do you mean they'd imprison *him*?" Mr. Murchison put this question with such suddenness and force that, for the moment, I wondered whether another explosion was imminent.

"That's my impression."

"Good old Court!"

The roar of laughter which followed was so unexpected and so infectious that I laughed as loudly as he.

After this outburst we sat facing one another in complete amity. There is nothing like a hearty laugh to bring two folks together.

"I'm afraid the poor gentleman has been doing his duty," said I, fishing for information.

Mr. Murchison closed one eye. "You mean by opposing our engagement?" said he.

"Of course," was my answer; and this provoked another laugh brimful of merriment, but lacking in the deep note of supreme enjoyment which had made the first so irresistible.

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"He's not exactly a bad lot," explained the prospective son-in-law. "He's—well! he's got a touch of old Puseley's complaint."

"What's that?"

Oliver's blue eyes twinkled as they scanned my astonished face.

"Haven't you ever been to the Cheshire Cheese with him?" he asked.

"Have you?"

"He took me to lunch there, when I came here about a year ago. We had some beer to begin with—good beer too!—and when we'd done, he had a tray of gin and water."

"But surely you didn't have any," I protested, much scandalized.

"No fear! I was in training. And besides, I knew I couldn't walk straight if I'd put gin on the top of that beer."

I managed to hold my tongue, but young Murchison saw how indignant I was, and he broke into a grin.

"The best of the joke was, he wanted to have another trayful, but he didn't like to, with me there. So he suddenly remembered he was expecting a client to come to him on important business, every minute; and then he shook hands, and said he hoped I shouldn't forget to look in here when I next came to town, and he was sure I should live to be a bishop. That was one of his jokes, you know!"

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"I'd rather we didn't talk any more about Mr. Puseley," I said, with some acidity. "It's hardly fair to him to tell tales out of school—or to me, either, seeing that I'm his partner."

"But I thought you must know all about him, or I wouldn't have said a word."

"Let's drop the subject, and go and have some lunch," said I.

"Thanks awfully! We ought to go to a coffee-tavern this time," was the answer.

We did not go to a coffee-tavern, but to my usual lunching-place, and before the meal was over we were on the best of terms. This was very gratifying, for I liked the boy and was interested in him. My vanity, too, was tickled; it was no small thing for one who was fifteen years his senior to have gained his confidence so soon.

"I say," he began confidentially, when we were each indulging in a cigarette, "there's something I want you to do for me! I've made up my mind not to go into the Church. Can you put things right with my uncle?"

"Why have you changed your mind?"

The question was one which I was obliged to put, and I asked it as a matter of course. But he seemed so doubtful as to his answer that I felt sure there must be scruples in the background, too personal in their nature to be put forward without encouragement.

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"We needn't go into details," said I, by way of giving him a lead; "but I must put some reason before your uncle. Perhaps you feel a difficulty about the Articles."

The answer came readily enough this time.

"The Articles! Oh no, I don't feel any difficulty about them. Why should I? I don't exactly remember what they are; but if other people can swallow them, I suppose I could."

"Then what is the difficulty?"

"It isn't the sort of thing you're thinking of; it's a personal objection. If a man's a clergyman, he's cut off from all his fellow-creatures, except old tabbies—male and female tabbies, I mean. I couldn't stand that. I don't mind your laughing," he protested merrily; "but I'll just ask you one question: Were you ever out anywhere where there was a clergyman, when you didn't find him a wet blanket? Did any one talk naturally? I don't mean twaddle about the weather and things in the papers—did any one talk *talk*?"

"It's so long since I met a clergyman in general company that I really can't remember what effect he had on our conversation; no doubt he raised it to a higher level," said I.

My guest received this evasion with undisguised contempt.

"You know what I mean," he said, with half-closed eyes and two emphatic nods of his head.

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"But if you don't want to be a clergyman, why on earth did you decide to enter the Church?"

"Well, Mr. Puseley seemed to think I ought to."

This came forth so demurely and was followed by such a chuckle that I knew the young villain had been lying in wait for the question.

"It was at the Cheshire Cheese," he explained. "Mr. Puseley kept on saying it would be a pity if my uncle's living went out of the family; and really, just then, I felt inclined to agree to anything. I didn't like to cry off when I'd thought over what I'd done, so I decided to give the plan a trial. I didn't mean to say anything until I finished my six months with Webb; but that's out of the question after what's happened. You understand; don't you?"

I had a glimmering of his meaning, but I preferred to hear him state it, before I said anything.

"Don't you see I must get away from the place—a good way off? I couldn't have given that promise, if I was going to be anywhere near. I might go to Oxford, if I was keen on the Church; but I'm not. I must have something to do that I can take an interest in, or what on earth will become of me for the next three years? I've no turn for the classics or theology: I simply loathe exegesis. I want to be a mining engineer."

"Sagacious youth!" I exclaimed in my delight. "You've taken quite a weight off my mind."

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"I thought you looked a bit uncomfortable when you said we could arrange details when you saw me again," said he. "I had a sort of notion of what was in your mind. Oh no! I couldn't possibly stay in the place, or near it. I talked it over with Webb, last night. He's a sensible chap, though he is a clergyman, and he agreed with me. I bade him good-bye this morning. I'm going to stay with a friend at Bude. Webb knows him. I've left my luggage at Paddington."

"And you'd arranged all this with the young lady?" For the second time that day, my astonishment was carrying me out of bounds.

"Oh yes; we had to arrange it all at once. I should like to tell you about her" he went on, wistfully; "but I suppose I'd better not."

"I should dearly like to hear it, but, perhaps I'd better know no more than you've told me already," I answered, not a little moved.

We meditated in silence after this, and as I weighed the pros and cons of the imbroglio, common-sense and sentiment trembled in the balance.

There must and would be an end of the affair. That, of course, was inevitable; but what a pity it seemed! Even common-sense might go to this length; for who could deny that in the abstract, young love was a pretty thing, and what man, whose blood was warm within, could have listened to the bald story, which had told so little and

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implied so much, without a touch of sympathy, and a lurking hope that, somehow or other, the boy's love-making might have a happy issue, after all.

The scales were still trembling as I reasoned thus; but when I remembered the promise, and the safeguards, which the two children had devised for its performance, romance carried the day and common-sense kicked the beam. And no wonder! Who could recall these things in all their freshness, and hold the balance even? "It's a shame to part 'em," thought I.

"Moley Hoses!" broke in the subject of my meditations as he sprang up, watch in hand. "I ought to be off. But don't you come! If you're expecting a client here, I won't tell tales out of school this time."

CHAPTER III

THE Rev. Thomas Murchison raised no objection to the proposed change in his nephew's calling, and the Court's sanction was obtained in due course. When the boy left Bude, it was to begin his new training in Newcastle. He called at Gray's Inn on his way through town, and we met upon the pleasant footing on which we had parted, but not a word was said upon the matter which had made us acquainted. He seemed all eagerness to enter upon his new walk of life, and there was nothing about him to suggest the lovelorn swain.

As the weeks slipped by, it was not in the nature of things that I should give much thought to him or his concerns, though, now and then, I wondered how the lovers were bearing their separation. I had many other things to occupy my mind, for the task of galvanizing back into life the moribund practice, in which I had sunk all my small capital, was an exacting one. With nobody to help me, but the always-faithful Peacock and a scrap of a boy, and hampered at every turn by my partner's deficiencies, I was beginning to lose heart, and to wonder whether

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I had better not give up the struggle and return to my country clerkship ; when almost without warning, the event so often longed for, but so little expected, came to pass : Puseley was removed from the scene.

Late one afternoon I received intelligence that he had stumbled upon the staircase of his favourite tavern, and would have to lie up for a few days with a bruised knee, and I heard no more of him until, a week or so later, a letter reached me from his doctor. This said that inflammation of a somewhat troublesome character had shown itself, and that the old gentleman was fretting so grievously over the office business that some effort ought to be made to pacify him. Marvelling greatly, and growling not a little, I at once betook myself to his residence in the Seven Sisters Road. This proved to be a two-storied little house, set back from the pavement, and having on one side a dilapidated stable and coach-house. When Puseley had taken the place, some thirty years before, I dare say it was a neat villa, standing in a district, that was residential and still countrified ; but when I saw it, it formed part of a loud commercial thoroughfare, with a dancing school on one side, and a so-called medical hall on the other.

I need not enter into details to justify the impression which I formed of my partner's home life. It will be enough to say that when the door had closed behind me, and I began to think over all that I had seen, or guessed, inside, I wondered, with something

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like a shudder, whether my own celibate existence would be called upon to face its end among surroundings so unspeakably melancholy as his.

Though Puseley was nearly seventy, I had gone to him expecting nothing serious ; but the moment that I took his hand and looked down at his face upon the pillow, I knew that our partnership was about to be dissolved. It was easy enough after this, to bear with seeming deference his long-hoarded abuse of all that I had done, or tried to do, to make the business prosper. As matters stood with him, it was only common humanity to let the stream of his invective run dry, and then do one's best to make him think that he should have his own way for the future.

After a while his peevishness wore off, and, thanks to a well-timed reference to the fishing-club, I had the satisfaction to see him brighten up, and to hear him relate the favourite story of his capture of a gigantic pike. He told it much in his usual way ; not forgetting to impress upon me when the end was in sight, that a pike should always be plain boiled, and eaten cold with a little anchovy. It would have been well for me if I had taken my departure before the afterglow of this delightful anecdote had died away. But I let the fortunate moment slip by, and before I could make a move, a conflict on the subject of his medicine had sprung up between him and his housekeeper. The woman was so helpless that I felt bound to support her, and in the end, the

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patient gave way. But all the old irritation and peevishness had come back, and for the time being, the absent doctor was the subject of it. Knowing what I did of my partner's way of life, it tried one sorely to be called upon to parry, over and over again, the oft-repeated complaint that to attempt to set a man upon his legs without stimulants was new-fangled nonsense; and when at length anger and reviling gave way to entreaty, and on this followed a burst of senile tears, the strain was more than I could bear. Six days after this all was over.

The third week of December was running out when we buried him in Finchley cemetery. Strange to say, Oliver Murchison stood with me at the grave-side. He had looked in at Gray's Inn the day before, to wish me a Merry Christmas, and had been much interested to hear of his late enemy's decease. The boy was staying in town for the holidays, as a guest of some cousins on his mother's side. On hearing that I had declined a place in one of the mourning coaches, and that it was my intention to take the train to Highgate and walk on to Finchley, he had asked leave to go with me.

It was a relief to pass out of the cemetery gates, and to get back into the open road. In some vague way I felt glad of the boy's companionship, though we tramped along without exchanging a word. I could think of nothing but the desolate scene at the grave; for every detail of it seemed to stand out

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clear and sharp before me. Five mourners had followed the hearse: three old cronies of the deceased—perhaps the last survivors of the fishing-club—his housekeeper, and a harmless, necessary drudge, her subordinate. There they stood, listening with bowed heads while the clergyman read the prayers, and under his lee crouched the sexton, clay-coloured from head to heel. And, as part of the same picture, and yet as something by itself, I also had before me the anxious, diffident face of one of the old cronies, just as I had seen it, not ten minutes before, when he drew me aside, and, with one hand still upon my arm, and his glance half-turned in the direction of the housekeeper, he whispered a hope that between us all, we should be able to do something for her, and he added, in a still shyer whisper, that she had looked after poor Puseley for five and twenty years; of course, it was most regrettable, but she hadn't made a penny out of him.

"I say!" began young Murchison; and then checked himself, as if doubtful whether I should care to have my meditations interrupted.

"Yes," I answered, not sorry to give them the go-by.

"Didn't it strike you, when we were at the grave, that those three old gentlemen were rather like one another—and something like Mr. Puseley?"

The fact had struck me very forcibly at the time, and I had been pondering over it as we tramped

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homeward. Nevertheless, I was surprised to learn that it had been visible to a lad of eighteen. The resemblance was no mere physical similarity. It was the hall-mark of a type; the brand set by Time upon old men run to seed.

"They all seemed very sorry," he went on.

"They were burying an old friend."

"Oh yes; but was it all *that*? They were so ancient, I was wondering whether they were saying to themselves, 'Who goes next?'"

"But when old people say that, don't they always say it out loud?" I asked.

Oliver, in his innocence, received the morsel of wisdom as a mere joke, but as such he appreciated it.

"And that wouldn't make them sad," he said, laughing.

"I suppose you're always going to funerals," he remarked, after we had been tramping on without discourse, for another half-mile.

This suggested a *clientèle* of such enormous magnitude that I laughed.

"But you must have been to a good many," he urged.

"Perhaps, a dozen—more or less."

"And did you ever go to one where there were no relatives?"

"N-o! But Mr. Puseley didn't seem to have any."

"Is that possible?"

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"The housekeeper knew of none, and when my clerk, Peacock, hunted up these old friends, they could tell him nothing. But, all the same, I think he must have had relations, and fallen out of touch with them, years ago."

"And he died without any of them knowing. How horrible!"

There was no gainsaying the substantial justice of this verdict, and as I pondered over it, many of the thoughts which had been passing through my mind during the last few days, came back to me.

"We ought to take it as a warning," said I, half-unconsciously putting some of them into words. "A man ought to keep a close watch upon himself, even when he's young. If he doesn't, he'll drift and drift till he's out of touch with everything that's good for him, and ten to one he'll lose nearly everything that's good *in* him. It's a risk we all run if we don't marry."

"And do you think that all bachelors drift and drift like that?"

"Bless me! No!" I said this with none the less emphasis or conviction, because I had put the question to myself, days ago, in the Seven Sisters Road, and had, then and there, proceeded to fortify my answer with a battery of good resolutions. "I only said one must take warning," I explained.

"But you think Mr. Puseley would have been happier, if he'd married when he was young?"

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Oliver put this to me with the air of a disciple, timidly anxious to receive instruction from lips that were well qualified to impart it.

"I'm sure of it," I asserted, a little surprised at his extraordinary deference, but hugging it to my bosom, all the same. "He would have been a different man altogether."

"And you think there always is a great risk, if a man's a bachelor?"

"I can't deny it."

"Oh-H——o!" remarked the disciple, with a rising intonation.

This brought me to forthwith, and the humour of the situation was irresistible. I had been sermonizing on the dangers of celibacy to the infant in Peters and Woodhouse.

It was a little unfortunate that the two mourning coaches and the hearse should have happened to trot by us just at this moment, for our merriment was somewhat unrestrained. At first blush, it was also a little mysterious; seeing that a trot is faster than a walk, and we were nearly two miles distant from the cemetery. But the explanation was not far to seek; and as Mr. Murchison very justly observed a few minutes later, when we were eating bread and cheese in the Woodman, there really, was nothing undignified in taking necessary refreshment at any time; even after a funeral.

CHAPTER IV

I FELL to work with renewed hope as soon as I was free of the blight of Puseley's co-partnership, but for the next few years my course was anything but a path of roses. I shiver when I think of the risks which I had to take in those days. If a client came to me with a case full of difficulties, I had to grapple with it, then and there, as best I could. I dared not let him think that there was anything in the whole legend of the law, which was doubtful or obscure to me. Nowadays, my position is an established one—such as it is!—and I can plead ignorance, and insist upon counsel being consulted; but in years gone by, when I was fighting for a livelihood, I had to make up my mind on the spur of the moment, and perhaps draw and copy a writ with my own hand, and then hurry down to the Courts to issue it. If I did not have to serve it, I thought myself lucky.

Time went quickly with me while that struggle was in progress; and Puseley's death seemed but a thing of yesterday, when one morning early in June, Peacock came to tell me that Mr. Murchison was in

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the outer office. It was not Oliver's first visit since the funeral ; we had met pretty often both at Gray's Inn, and at the modest lodgings, which I then occupied in Guildford Street. In those days I did not give dinners ; and, to tell truth, my usual evening meal was a high tea of no very lofty character. Oliver had shared this banquet with me on two or three occasions, but in the long talks afterwards, never a word had been said about his engagement.

"Hasn't Mr. Murchison come of age, sir ?" asked my henchman, who knew something about Peters and Woodhouse.

"Nonsense !" I began ; but, as I spoke, a date or two came into my mind, and I knew that Peacock was right. "Yes ! he came of age three weeks ago. Good heavens, how time flies !"

"I ought to have written to congratulate you, Murchison," I remarked, as we shook hands.

"How on earth did you know ?" he asked, after a pause of blank astonishment.

"Well, I remembered that you were eighteen in the May before Puseley died, and that made you twenty-one last month."

"And you guessed—oh, I understand now ! You're congratulating me on having come of age." Oliver stopped to laugh. "I thought you were congratulating me on being married," he said.

"Married ?"

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"Yes; I was married on the fourteenth of last month."

"The very day you came of age!"

Benedick nodded. It did one good to see how happy he was.

"You monster of duplicity," I exclaimed, and then I laughed till I could laugh no more.

"So you didn't think it would come off," was his triumphant comment.

"I'm not quite sure about that—your little joke after Puseley's funeral rather shook me—but I certainly didn't think it would come off so soon."

"We were to meet on my twenty-first birthday. We'd arranged to meet at twelve o'clock on the steps of St. Paul's."

"You arranged that three years ago, and you really did not see or hear anything of one another in the mean time?"

Oliver nodded again. "And we met at the bottom of the steps just as the clock was striking. She came round from the north and I came from the south. We weren't to go to the steps till the clock began to strike."

"But a hundred things might have happened to prevent it," I gasped. "It makes my head swim to think of what the odds were."

"I didn't feel the slightest doubt that we should meet—no more did she," said the bridegroom, with calm superiority.

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"It wasn't quite so chancey as you think," he went on. "If anything had happened to either of us, Webb would have told the other. One knew *that* from the beginning; and, as a matter of fact, one got a scrap of news sometimes."

"Webb! Who's Webb?"

"The parson I was reading with when I first came here. She was in his parish, you see."

"I remember; and, now I come to think of it, you told him all about the engagement. And did you walk straight into the cathedral and get married?"

"No; we walked to St. George's, Bloomsbury. We took care to give this old show of yours a wide berth—I'd been keeping *my* weather eye open for a fortnight: I didn't want to run against you, before it was all over. We went along the Strand and up Drury Lane. I'd left the licence with the clerk and arranged everything, the day before."

"But how did you get the licence? I thought you had to swear that you were of age."

"So you do; but I knew you could get the licence while you waited—I saw that in Whitaker, and I inquired at the place beforehand, to make sure—so I applied for it the day before my birthday. I knew I was legally of age on that day: you put me up to that. Don't you remember telling me the story of the elder twin who died? Well, that was when you mentioned it. You didn't know I was bottling it up for future use. At one time I thought

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I'd try and get a letter to her on the morning of the fourteenth, but I decided I wouldn't. It seemed a pity, somehow."

"How do you get a marriage licence?" I asked.

"You go to the Faculty Office. It's just south of St. Paul's: it's an office very much like yours. (Here he looked round the panelled walls of my room, and I fancied that he sniffed a little.) They fill up some forms, and then you have to swear an affidavit. They take you out to some place round the corner—I don't exactly know where. It's a tiny place—a regular little hutch!—and there's a clergyman there—doing nothing, you know, but sit there—like a spider waiting for flies. He tells you that you're swearing it's your name and handwriting, and that it's all true. I went wrong, for I said Amen, instead of kissing the book. It sounded like a prayer, you know; he intoned it."

"That must have been very impressive," said I, recalling the familiar words, "especially in a hutch! And was that all?"

"They give you the licence as soon as you get back to the place."

"Doesn't some one have to give the lady away?"

"The clerk did that; and he and a friend of his—a policeman off duty—signed the register as witnesses—Oliver Hill Murchison, bachelor, and Ada Milicent Craddock, spinster. By-the-by, when the clerk asked what my father-in-law was, I said he was a widower, and they all laughed. That was

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horribly unlucky, for she's so sensitive about him. It ended in their putting him down as a gentleman. That was because I said he didn't do anything."

"And where is your wife now?"

"She's walking up and down between your doorway and the Town Hall. I couldn't get her to come up and beard you in your den. Let's fetch her; I want you to make my will before we go away."

We came upon her unawares as we passed into Verulam Buildings, a small, slight figure in a brown study. She was gazing absently upon the gardens; and as she turned at the sound of our footsteps, I saw that her eyes were very gentle and that her face was as innocent as a child's.

She was so shy when I took her hand and spoke a word or two of felicitation, that Oliver promptly tucked her under his arm, and he made conversation with me until we were back in my room.

While the will-making was in progress, I was able to study her face, unobserved. It had none of the red-and-white prettiness which one associates with a lad's love, and there was character in it, for all its childlike simplicity. She was at her ease, now that the introduction was over and she was free to efface herself. Shy, quiet happiness was in her eyes and on her lips, as she sat watching her husband; but as I looked at her, a conviction stole upon me that, apart from him, there had been little happiness in her life. I wondered whether her father was responsible for

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this?—"She's so sensitive about him," had been Oliver's words that morning. I had them in mind, and I remembered what he had said three years before.

The young couple had to undergo Peacock's congratulations when I called him in to act as the second witness. My plump henchman knew what had happened, and so exuberant was his delight that to leave the room without giving expression to it was a thing wholly impossible. There are a good many people whom a marriage affects in this way.

Mrs. Oliver escaped with a whispered, "Wish you happiness, madam," accompanied by a broad smile, but on Oliver, himself, Peacock had no mercy. I was conscious, as I sat completing the draft will, that the unfortunate bridegroom had been penned into a corner, and was receiving congratulations in brimming measure. I caught the words, "Married at twenty, myself, sir; never regretted it; only sorry I left it so late." When I looked up, Oliver, blushing and overborne, but not a little tickled with his tormentor's fervour, was wringing him by the hand, and the girl was watching them with an amused smile.

"We're going to Newcastle," said Oliver, later on; "I must put in a good long spell there yet. Perhaps we're going to look up Uncle Thomas by the way," he added; and he winked in order that I might know that this was a joke.

"We really are going to see Mr. and Mrs. Webb," said his lady, shyly.

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"Oh yes. Webb's no end of a good chap; and Mrs. Webb, her price is above rubies."

"This is the first I've heard of her," said I, addressing Mrs. Oliver.

She was still shy, but after a moment's hesitation she spoke out.

"Oliver didn't know how kind Mrs. Webb had been," she said, blushing. "She came to see me, and when I told her how young I was when I left school, and asked her to advise me, she didn't rest until she found a way of having me taught. And she made a friend of me; I used to go to the vicarage two evenings a week. And Mr. Webb was quite as kind as she was."

"He used to read Jeremy Taylor to them," said Monsieur, solemnly.

"Oh, Oliver! He only read that once. It was Shakespeare he used to read, and that was only for a little while. Mrs. Webb was at work with me all the rest of the time."

"All's well with Oliver!" thought I, touched by her generous glow. This had flashed through my mind when I first saw her, and now I felt sure of it.

"And Mrs. Webb did that for nearly three years," explained the scoffer, as if anxious to make amends.

I was left to attend to my business soon after this, but we all met again when the day's work was

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done. The testator had extorted a pledge that I would dine with the pair, and had asked me to select the restaurant. I chose one in Soho; an Italian place where the cookery was good and the charges moderate. I thought that the foreign company would help to amuse the bride.

"Isn't it stupendous, Milly?" whispered Oliver, playfully, soon after we were seated. The country mouse was gazing about her with a round-eyed wonder, delightful to behold.

Only once was there a cloud upon her face. This was when Oliver rose to the greatness of the occasion, and ordered a bottle of champagne. Just at the moment she was scanning the *carte*, and cudgelling her brains over it; but no sooner was the order given than her eyes filled with terror, and, quick as lightning, they sought her husband's face. He knew nothing of this, for his head was turned away; but the mere sight of him seemed to reassure her, and the next instant she had gone back to the *carte*, with moist eyes and a happy little pout—"But it's Oliver," said the pout, in mockery of her own alarms.

Whatever associations the calling for the wine may have aroused, they vexed her no more that evening. She did not take a share in it, but she watched Oliver drink it with an enjoyment keener than his own; and when in a frenzy of connoisseurship he smacked his lips, and praised it to the skies, there were no reservations in her smile.

CHAPTER V

OLIVER and I met several times in the course of the two years which followed his marriage, but when I next saw Milly, she was a proud young mother—a hackneyed phrase, that seemed quite beautiful when one looked on her with Tommy in her arms.

The three had come to town to settle; for the term of pupilage was at an end, and Oliver had obtained an appointment in the office of the great Sir Angus in Victoria Street. They were staying with the London cousins, and everybody was busy house-hunting on their behalf.

The cousins were three spinsters, all on the sunny side of forty, who had petted Oliver since his babyhood. They had made friends with Milly just after the marriage, and from time to time one or another of them had stayed in the Newcastle lodgings. There were gay times in the Miss Peverills' home while the house-hunt was in progress, and not a little baby-worship. I could take a hand in this game when occasion demanded, for I had been on easy terms with my sister's children from their cradles.

The house was found at last: a prosaic but

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commodious tenement upon an ancient by-way, three miles long, which tradition said had been a bridle-track through the great forest of Middlesex, and which, widened to a modern thoroughfare, still wavered in its old course from the top of Highgate Hill to the site of a prehistoric battle, hard by the river Fleet.

There were many little gatherings in this house during the next three years, and much simple hospitality: cordial and pleasant at the time; quite impossibly happy when looked back upon. I met the Webbs pretty often round Oliver's mahogany, and once it was my ill-fortune to encounter Uncle Thomas; a selfish old recluse, whose manners, as his nephew remarked, were barely civilized, and whose one redeeming feature was his fondness for Milly and the boy, his godson.

Many memories of the fun and banter, that used to circulate round that board come back to me, but I will set down only one of them. Webb was a little like Sydney Smith in appearance, and not a little like that divine in his table talk. On one occasion, when he had been the life and soul of the company, I ventured to lay before him Oliver's contention, that a parson acted as a wet blanket wherever he went.

"Ha-ha, I'm responsible for that! Mind you, I didn't say every parson; but I put the notion into his head. Didn't I, Oliver?"

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Our host considered for a moment. "Yes, sir, I suppose I must have got it—from listening to what you said," was his answer.

But it was not at the little dinners that my happiest hours were spent. The Sunday afternoons when I was the only visitor, are the times that I recall with the most poignant fondness; the cosy chats with man and wife in the front attic, which was Oliver's sanctum, and the noisy teas in the nursery on the floor below. The house had a grand view on either side; for the attic looked over a murky wilderness of slate roofs, with land-marks standing out here and there, and, far away, the dome of St. Paul's; while, from the nursery windows, one could see a chain of ponds and the flagstaff on Hampstead Heath.

Tommy and I were intimate from the very early days, when he found his chief delight in "making bang-bang" on the tray of his chair, down to the time when the third of these happy years was running out, and over his picture-book he would expound to me the history of Noah's Ark, while, in the back-ground, Oliver, the geologist, sat smoking with an air of grave abstraction—and with one eye shut.

In the second summer of Tommy's pilgrimage his grandfather died. Oliver had been right when he said that the man was not exactly a bad lot, but candour compels me to say that he was so near the border line that the world was undoubtedly the wholesomer for his disappearance. In a letter announcing

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the domestic bereavement, Oliver, who had always taken a comic view of old Craddock's delinquencies, professed to find in him a certain resemblance to the Thane of Cawdor ; not because the deceased was a gentleman in whom any responsible being could build an absolute trust, but because nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. This eulogium was true in a sense ; for the departed, whose state of health had threatened a gradual, and correspondingly expensive, process of decay, had died suddenly, without giving trouble to any one.

When the old man died, Oliver and his small household were established in a cottage at the seaside. To this cottage there were many visitors—cousins and others—during the June and July of the tenancy. I used to run down for the week ends, but my quarters were at a neighbouring tavern. By this time I was beginning to feel my feet in Gray's Inn. The days of grinding economy were over, and I thought it unfair to my friends, to put an unnecessary strain upon the resources of their temporary home.

The mantelpiece of the sitting-room was a high, old-fashioned affair, with a quilted valance hanging from it, and the pillar on each side was adorned with picture tiles of a faint blue. One of these represented an aged and very emaciated couple, taking a last farewell of their descendants. The venerable pair were stretched recumbent upon

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a four-post bedstead, their chins resting upon their folded hands, while round them knelt several younger figures in attitudes of intense dejection.

It was on my first visit after the funeral that Tommy drew my attention to this work of art. He had from the beginning been attracted by its intrinsic beauty, and just then it bulked very large upon his horizon, because that afternoon he had discovered in the aged couple a strong likeness to his own parents.

When Oliver came in, he was at once conducted to the fireplace, to pay his meed of admiration to the child's discovery. This done, Tommy toddled away; but his father lingered behind to pore over certain words in faint German script, which were written upon a scroll over the bedstead. At last, after several failures he got at the substance—

"A good name is a goodly heritage."

"I suppose that means the children are getting nothing else," said he.

Milly made no comment at the time; but when, later on, I chanced to refer to the funeral, I saw her eyes wander towards the fireplace, and presently she crossed over to it. From the other end of the long, dark room, Oliver and I watched her as she stood there in her black dress. The child was in her arms, half asleep; and just before she turned away, we saw her kiss him and whisper something in his ear. I knew intuitively that it

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was a promise—come what might, Tommy should have *that* goodly heritage!

"She's thinking of the old 'un,'" said Oliver, lightly, as soon as we were alone; but the next moment he strolled to the mantelpiece, and he stood there cogitating, pipe in hand. I thought, as I eyed him, what a fine strong face he had.

CHAPTER VI

NEXT year there was another migration to the cottage, but in the summer after that, Milly and the boy went to Bude, on a visit to Oliver's friends. He was engaged upon the superintendence of some borings near Cliffborough in Derbyshire, and his presence could not be dispensed with. We were to have a holiday together in the autumn.

I was seated in my office one morning in July, when a telegram was brought in. It had been despatched from Wryston, the scene of Oliver's borings. It ran as follows:—*Colliery accident. Murchison hurt. Come immediately. Rail to Cliffborough: then carriage. Wire Red Lion for post-horses—Doctor Stephenson.*

A telegram in those terms could have only one meaning—if I wanted to see my friend alive, there was not a moment to be lost.

Fortunately my good, stolid, unemotional Peacock was at hand, and in three minutes he had looked out the train and made all the arrangements. I had twenty minutes in which to get to St. Pancras: he would see me into a cab at the corner of Theobalds Road, and then wire to the Red Lion and the doctor. I must take some money with me: fortunately there was twenty pounds in the office till.

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Newsboys were crying the accident on Cliffborough platform. I got a paper as I passed out to the vehicle that was in waiting, a victoria with a postilion and four horses. I managed to read the report as we dashed, swaying and jerking, round the corners. There had been an explosion in a mine hard by the new borings. Eight colliers had been entombed. When all was panic, Oliver, who knew the workings, had appeared at the pit mouth, and, calmly and resolutely, he had organized a rescue party, and had headed it. The eight men had been saved, but he had been buried under a fall of *débris*. Four doctors had been down to him, and by incredible exertions he had been brought to the surface alive. He was lying at the Half Moon inn at Wryston, the latest messages reporting him as still breathing.

I saw that we had got beyond the streets when I laid down the newspaper, and for some time to come I was just conscious that we were flying between hedgerows. But that was all. It was only when I felt the pace slacken, and I heard the postilion shouting to clear the way, that I came to myself. Then I saw that we were moving at a trot up a broad untidy street, and the next moment we were pulling up before the Half Moon. It seemed the one old house in the place. There was an open space before it, with a horse trough and a row of pollards. There were benches too, with shawled

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women, who rocked themselves to and fro, and moaned to the children in their arms. The whole population seemed to be out of doors. All this flashed on my sight as I walked up to the inn. A sound like a great sob went up after me.

Dr. Stephenson was on the threshold; a small dark man with a face like a jesuit priest.

"Is he living?"

"Yes, he's living; but——" And the doctor said no more.

I was led through the bar and up a flight of stairs beyond. On the landing my guide stopped.

"I'll be back in a moment," he said.

"Is he in pain?" I faltered.

The doctor's nerves were worn to ribbons. "Of course not!" he answered angrily. "Do you think we're fools?" He disappeared through a doorway as he spoke.

Two or three minutes later the door opened, and he came forward and took me by the hand. He was all gentleness now, as he led me inside and whispered that I must not give way. I swore to myself that I would not.

It was a spacious room; and it was so dim that at first I could see nothing more upon the bed than a vague outline, but when I grew accustomed to the light, I knew that it was Oliver's head upon the pillow, and that one arm lay outside the coverlet. In the background, glimmered the figures of two nurses.

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I could see no sign of life in the upturned face, and when I took the hand that lay near me, it struck cold.

The doctor was on the other side bending over the pillow. I could see his face distinctly. After a long pause, he spoke in low, measured tones—

“Your friend is here. He is holding your hand. He is waiting for the message—the message to your wife. Can you give a sign that you hear me?”

I waited, hoping for a pressure of the fingers, but the doctor knew better. His gaze was still fixed upon the pillow.

The interval of silence was so long that I had given up all hope, when suddenly Stephenson raised his hand as if to warn me, and I saw that Oliver's eyes had opened, and were resting on my face. It was for the last time!

The next instant they were closed again but his lips were moving. In a hollow whisper he spoke three words, making a pause after the first—“*Love . . . and Tommy.*”

“Tell him you understand!” said the doctor, still bending low.

By a great effort I obeyed him. “I understand! . . . I am to give your love to her and to Tommy. I will go to them straightway.”

Oliver's lips moved again; and more slowly and disjointedly than before, his words came forth—“*All brothers . . . wives and children . . . won't regret.*”

This was unintelligible to me; but Stephenson was

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able to interpret it from what had fallen from the dying man, hours before.

"When his wife understands that eight brother men—men with wives and children—have been saved, she will not regret what has happened."

What a tribute it was to the loftiness of the wife's soul! Stephenson had tried hard to speak without emotion, but in vain. His voice was shaking all the time.

After this there was another faint movement of the lips, but no sound came. In the long silence that followed, the doctor rose to his feet, and stretched himself, but he kept his eyes fixed upon the patient. Suddenly, there came a burst of low sobbing from behind. One of the nurses had broken down.

"Leave the room!" hissed her superior officer, wheeling round in a fury—"if you can't control yourself," followed in the next breath, as he repented him of his violence.

"Hush!" I whispered; for I thought the lips were moving.

In a flash Stephenson's head was bending again over the pillow; but he was too late.

"I couldn't catch them," he said helplessly.

But I had caught those last words. Oliver had murmured, "*Good name,*" and I could fathom his meaning—Tommy had a goodly heritage.

A PASSIVE RESISTER

CHAPTER I

My client the Rev. Saxon Dawes, doctor of theology, is a Nonconformist divine. He is a good-looking little man in the middle thirties, fresh-coloured, and entirely clean-shaven. The university of which he is an alumnus is that of Rosherville, Tennessee.

I had been warned by his introducer that his pulpit fervour was extraordinary, and that when moved, he was not apt to measure his words. He has undoubtedly, a great command of language, and to speak the plain truth, he is, or was, a slave to his own gift. In the course of my first interview with him, he gave me a taste of his quality. He began rationally enough, and so long as he had the facts of the case to deal with, he kept within bounds, but no sooner had he begun to comment on them, than his colour deepened, his protuberant blue eyes flashed fire, and his speech became a wild torrent of denunciation and wrath. I listened to him with some wonder, for his story had made it clear to me that the object of his

A Passive Resister

invective was a man whom he had wronged, and I had a strong suspicion that the reverend gentleman knew this too, and was of opinion that he would be lucky if he escaped the payment of damages. Under the circumstances, it seemed childish to bring such an oratorical fire-hose into play in a solicitor's office.

I made no attempt to stop him. "The sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep," was my reflection, as I gazed blankly at him, and noted how the bold curl above his forehead was losing its rigidity and beginning to straggle over his temples, and how the points of his collar had been wrenched from under his waistcoat and were fretting his white tie into disorder.

"Hum!" I said, when at last the torrent had ceased to flow, and the orator sat wiping his brow.

He started as if I had administered an electric shock, and he gazed at me with a look that was wholly crestfallen. I was bound to let him know that my view of the case was unfavourable; but I would have proceeded with more diplomacy, if I had known that a mere ejaculation could so upset him. "Emotional, not to say hysterical; as easily depressed as uplifted," thought I.

"You think I'm in a mess?"

He spoke deferentially, almost humbly, and there was a frightened look in the eyes, which had been blazing so fiercely.

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"You think I'm in a mess?" he repeated.

There could be no two opinions on that point. A certain eminent contractor had secured the contract for rebuilding a bridge in the neighbourhood of my client's chapel. This had given offence to a member of the flock, a local builder whose tender had been rejected. Instigated by this person, and upon no evidence other than his assertions, the Rev. Saxon had taken upon himself to refer to the matter in the pulpit, and to charge the contractor, firstly, with having paid wages in a public house, and, secondly, with having wickedly and maliciously tried to ruin a Nonconformist and teetotal workman, who had refused to enter the place. This had come to the ears of the slandered party; and a fiery letter from his solicitors, demanding an explanation and threatening proceedings had followed.

"A clear case of slander, I'm afraid," said I. "I see they claim to have a shorthand note of your sermon. Did you pitch it very strong?"

"I'm afraid I was rather heated. I can't recall what I said, but I'm afraid I was rather warm. It is such a wicked thing to put the temptation to drink before working men, that——"

I broke in here, for my client's voice was beginning to rise, and I had no wish to listen to a repetition of his outburst.

"He seems to think it was a wicked thing to bring false charges against him," I said icily.

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"I didn't know they were false."

"Of course you didn't ; but we must face the facts as we now know them."

"I can't defend what I said."

"And you're sorry you said it ? "

"I'm very sorry indeed !" His eyes sought the solicitors' letter as he said this, and he spoke with great conviction. By the exercise of no little self-control, I managed to keep my countenance.

"I'm sorry, apart from that letter," he went on. "It isn't seemly for a minister of religion to slander a fellow-creature. I feel that. Yes, I am sorry."

"We must try and put it right," I said encouragingly.

The little man's manner satisfied me that he was speaking the truth, and he looked so innocent and forlorn, that I began to pity him.

"The truth is, I sometimes go a little further than I mean," he went on, still very penitent. "I'm sure you'll do your best. I dare say you can guess that I'm not rich. I'm a widower without children ; but I've only three hundred a year and no savings. There's my furniture, by-the-by, and I've insured my life. Now you know all I have. If they bring an action, I shall be in a bad way."

This was so practical, and according to my experience, so unusually frank that my heart warmed to the reverend gentleman.

"You leave it to me," I said. "You shall hear

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something in a day or two. And don't you worry yourself in the mean time ! It's a bad thing to be too hopeful in these matters, but I don't anticipate that anything very serious will happen."

The contractor was satisfied with an apology. The thanks which my client offered me when the matter had been arranged were a little florid, but I had no doubt of their sincerity.

A few months later I had proof that he had not forgotten me, for I received from him a presentation copy of a small book, entitled "Old Testament Heroes." In the note which came with it, he said that this was his first appearance as an author. With the wariness of an old bird, I did not let the sun go down before I had written acknowledging the gift, and enlarging in glowing terms upon the pleasure which I hoped to receive from its perusal.

It was some two years after "Old Testament Heroes" had been laid before the public, that the author reappeared in Gray's Inn. He came without notice, and at first I thought that he was again in trouble. There was an air of suppressed excitement about him as he dropped into a chair, and began to brush his hat with his sleeve. His opening words were, however, reassuring.

"I'm not in another mess. Ha, ha, ha !" There was nervousness in his laugh, but it was excitement, not uneasiness, that lay behind it.

"No, I'm not in a mess this time," he continued ;

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"though you might think I was, if you knew what I wanted. I'm going to give a bill of sale."

"A bill of sale!"

"Yes, a bill of sale. I thought you'd be astonished. It doesn't sound quite respectable; does it?"

"I don't know about that, but it certainly isn't a nice way of raising money. There's so much publicity about it."

To my surprise, the Rev. Saxon Dawes received this with a peal of laughter.

"Publicity! I must face that," he said; and he laughed again.

"I don't see anything to laugh at."

"Can't you guess what I mean? Surely you know what we Passive Resistors are doing?"

"What has passive resistance to do with bills of sale? I thought it meant letting the local authorities seize your goods."

"We've got a little beyond that. We don't let the bishops get our money now to propagate Romanism. They have to send us to prison instead."

"Because you've no goods to levy on?"

"Precisely; so now we give some one a bill of sale. No money passes, and, of course, the things remain with us."

"Rather a complicated business," I remarked.

"Ah, but every man sent to prison for conscience' sake, knocks another nail into the coffin of this

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infamous Tory Government. I suppose you know Mr. Bellamy Orme ; he's a lawyer."

"I know something of him," I answered. "Do you know him ?"

"He's a friend of mine." The pride in the little man's tone was unmistakable. "He's going to stand for our division. We expect an election in a few months. The present Ministry can't live long, and then we shall win the seat. I've been doing a good deal of political work lately. We Free Church ministers wield an immense power if we care to exercise it. We're beginning to take our proper place at last. That's what Orme said to me last night—I was dining with him in the Temple."

As a matter of fact, I knew more of Mr. Bellamy Orme, K.C., than I thought it necessary to avow. He is a jovial, loose-tongued cynic, doing a considerable business in the shadier walks of the King's Bench Division, and making occasional appearances in Divorce and at the Old Bailey. Cold-shouldered by his fellows of the Bar, he is of high repute in theatrical circles, and with the baser elements of his own profession he is very popular indeed. Nor is this popularity undeserved ; for though a man may be the shadiest of solicitors, or the most disreputable of managing clerks, Mr. Bellamy Orme will treat him like a brother, if only there are briefs to be got by making up to him.

A visit to this great lawyer's chambers is a

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curious experience for a solicitor of the ordinary type. I have been assured by old practitioners that at consultations, Sir Richard Bethell would lie at full length upon a sofa, and would so demean himself to both junior and client, that ere five minutes had gone by, the right toe of each of them would be tingling to kick him. And I have been told that it was Sir Roundell Palmer's custom to receive his junior with a handshake, and then to acknowledge the presence of the solicitor by a frosty bow. Things are managed very differently at Mr. Orme's. In his chambers there is no mincing criticism of details, no half-veiled assertion of superiority, no stand-offishness of any kind. From that warm-blooded atmosphere a new client is pretty certain to carry away the recollection of a slap or two upon the back, to say nothing of a few genial oaths, and, perhaps, a gross story.

Though leading counsel of this type are not common, and it is rare for two of such gladiators to flourish at the same time, I am old stager enough to have known several of the kidney; all patrons of the drama; all chronically insolvent: loose livers and jolly companions, every one! As a purveyor of the rhetoric, which is supposed to move jurymen to return outrageous verdicts, Mr. Bellamy Orme is in no whit inferior to his brethren in the same line of business, and in cross-examination, as the art is practised by such ruffians, he has no living rival. A

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very fair summary of his methods, as compared with those of his contemporaries, was contained in an observation which I overheard outside the Divorce Court—"Good old Orme! he cuts it a bit nearer the knuckle than any of 'em."

Knowing all this, it was laughable to hear a Non-conformist minister reverentially quoting the man's electioneering trash, and glorying in his friendship.

"I didn't know that Mr. Orme was a candidate," I said, by way of leading up to a word of warning. "I never heard that he had ambitions in that direction."

"I don't think he had until the Education Act was passed. That pricked his conscience like a spear. He was saying last night that it behoved every man to put his shoulder to the wheel until such an iniquity had ceased to defile the pages of the Statute Book. I don't think he's allied to any particular religious body, but he's a man of strong religious feeling. A magnificent speaker, too."

"I've heard him," said I, drily.

But the Rev. Saxon was too full of his idol to notice such a trifle as an inflection.

"And he's something of a literary man," he went on. "I don't think I ever heard anything more stimulating than his criticism on my little book—the 'Old Testament Heroes,' you know. It wasn't mere praise; one gets sick of that. It was the discriminating criticism of a scholar, who had taken the trouble

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to study your book, so as to grasp the standpoint from which you wrote it. He's going to read the manuscript of a second series of the 'Heroes,' which I've just finished."

At this moment a clerk came in with a card. "Mr. Fitzroy Nangle: a friend of Dr. Dawes," he said, as he handed it to me.

"Oh yes; I was just going to tell you about him," said the learned doctor. "He arranged to meet me here; but I came a little early. He has my full confidence; he's one of my church officers."

Mr. Fitzroy Nangle proved to be a person of extraordinary appearance. He was a lean man, well stricken in years, whose dress was that of a dandy in a fashion plate, and whose lank hair, the colour of a dead leaf, was parted at the back and brought forward in wisps round his ears. He came into my room, struggling with a lavender glove, and as I took his hand, I noticed the glitter of three or four diamond rings.

"A very pretty figure to take round the collecting-box," thought I, as I listened to his assurances of the pleasure which he felt at making my acquaintance. His manner was as oily as his hair, and he diffused about him a strong odour of bergamot.

One's first impression of a gentleman approaching seventy, who garbs himself in raiment suggestive of a youthful bridegroom, is not likely to be favourable; and when that raiment sits upon the wearer as if his

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pigeon-breasted trunk were a light wickerwork basket, and his members were no more substantial than sticks of sealing-wax, to say nothing of his possessing a mean face, adorned on either side with a wisp of clay-coloured hair, most elaborately curled, an ordinary person can hardly be censured for thinking, at first blush, that such an individual must be a fool. Before, however, Mr. Nangle had got to the end of his soft nothings, I began to doubt the correctness of my first impression. There was something in his eyes which I could not fathom, and I had a conviction that he was studying me as closely as I was studying him.

But whether he was fool or knave, and apart altogether from his gorgeous appearance and offensive perfume, one thing was certain : a man with that manner had no business to walk the earth. The slimy fervour of his remarks to me had been bad enough ; but when he proceeded to greet the Rev. Saxon, he made my gorge rise. He took one of the little man's hands between both his own and pressed it to his bosom.

"Our friend has told you the object of our visit, I suppose," said this very objectionable person, with a smile, which displayed a brave show of false teeth.

"It's about a bill of sale, I understand."

"Yes, yes ! a bill of sale to put our friend's goods and chattels out of the enemy's reach. An unpleasant necessity—such an unpleasant necessity !—

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but in these matters we must take things as we find them."

"Dr. Dawes has explained the proposed transaction; and I'm not sure that I like it," said I.

"Possibly you are not a supporter of our movement?" insinuated Mr. Nangle, with a patient smile, but with rather less honey in his tone.

"As a matter of fact, I am not."

"Then, no doubt, you would rather be relieved of the business. We, of all people in the world, ought to respect a brother's convictions. You agree with me there, Dr. Dawes?"

Mr. Nangle's manner was still apostolically mild and gentle, but there was an uneasy look in his eye as he turned to his pastor.

"The difficulty which I feel has nothing to do with my personal opinions," I struck in, before the reverend gentleman could say anything. "Bills of sale are not much in my line, but if there's to be no *bonâ fide* consideration here, I doubt if any one can frame an instrument that will even look decent—to say nothing of what will happen if it's attacked—unless Dr. Dawes subscribes to something that isn't true. I'm sure he doesn't mean to do that."

"Really, really! Is it necessary even to suggest such a thing?" protested the church officer, with his hand uplifted. "Need we pursue the matter any further, Dr. Dawes, so far as this gentleman is concerned?"

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"I ought to hear anything that could be said against it," said the minister, uncomfortably. "One mustn't do evil that good may come of it," he added, his eye wandering uneasily from Nangle's face to mine and back again. "No, no, we mustn't do that."

"Of course not; but surely, my dear friend, there can be no doubt on the moral question, and surely you must remember how Mr. Orme laughed at the idea of there being any legal difficulties. Why, it was on his assurance that there were none that you promised last night to be a torchbearer in the good cause."

There was a suave deference in Nangle's tone, but his leather cheeks were slightly flushed, and he seemed to be watching his shepherd very closely.

Dawes said nothing. I could see that he was anxious to hear me out, but was a little overborne by the remembrance of his promise.

"It must not be forgotten," resumed the church officer, "that our brethren all over England and Wales have taken the step which Dr. Dawes has pledged himself to take——"

"That is so! Surely they can't all be wrong," exclaimed his chief, brightening up.

"They may have acted under bad advice," said I, looking straight at the evil counsellor.

He flushed up under this declaration of war, and a gleam that was not at all apostolic sparkled

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in his eyes. But only for a moment; he was far too wary to give me the advantage of quarrelling with him before his minister.

"Our brethren have taken counsel of those learned in the wisdom of this world, and what, sir, is far more important, they have sought guidance elsewhere," he said, with meek reproach.

"You must pardon me if I speak with some warmth," he continued; "but the truth is, our friend, Dr. Dawes, has already given some offence to the more zealous of our brethren. I will not say that he was wrong, but I am naturally anxious that he shall not weaken his influence by again grieving those who are bearing the burden and heat of the day, if anything so painful can be avoided."

"How did you offend?" I asked the minister.

"I refused to take legal proceedings against the auctioneer, who sold a silver inkstand of mine to pay my proportion of the last rate. He committed some slight informality—I forget exactly what it was. He came and explained that the mistake was a mere slip of his own, and he apologized for it. I really couldn't go to law with him after that. Only the Sunday before, I had been preaching from the text, '*Blessed are the merciful.*' As a matter of fact, I promised the man I wouldn't do anything. I couldn't let him go away with the fear of an action hanging over him. That's a terrible thing for any one of moderate means."

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From the shamefaced air with which the poor little man looked at Nangle when he began this explanation, I could see that the more zealous brethren, including his church officer, had bitterly resented this tenderness towards the enemy's agent.

"I think you did quite right." I spoke warmly, for at the end of his explanation he had turned to me with a grateful look, which I quite understood.

"I say nothing to the contrary," protested Nangle; "but——" And by way of hinting the disapproval which he did not think it politic to declare, he uplifted both his hands, and grinned hideously.

"Perhaps it was a matter of conscience with Dr. Dawes," I remarked, a strong inclination to assault the noisome one tingling in every fibre of my body.

A red spot burned in his cheeks, and the crows-footed old eyes were very angry. I admit that I had purposely laid a little stress on the word conscience, in the hope that this would infuriate him.

"Possibly to you, sir, the whole movement seems a mistake?" he said.

"I know very little about it, and care less; but I must confess I don't sympathize with it in the least."

Nangle looked at the Rev. Saxon as much as to say, "Need we stop here any longer after that?" and began to put on his glove. Seeing, however, that his invitation was disregarded, and

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that the other was still in doubt, he discovered that the fingers demanded a deal of coaxing; and as he fiddled with them, I felt certain that he was racking his brains for something, which would bring the discussion to an end.

"I mustn't waste your time by trying to argue the point," he said, when the glove had been eased on to his satisfaction. "I don't suppose I should bring you round to my views, and I'm sure you wouldn't make a convert of me—or of Dr. Dawes, either."

He spoke in perfect good-humour, and he patted my shoulder with a playfulness that was quite kittenish.

"Only yesterday," he went on, in the same easy way—"only yesterday, Dr. Turpin was telling me how he had argued for an hour with a member of your profession, without the least result; and it's not likely that I shall succeed where *he* failed—or even Dr. Dawes himself. What do you say, doctor?"

"I don't pretend to have Dr. Turpin's influence." Dr. Dawes made this admission with some coldness.

"Of course, I was only referring to his influence. You know me too well to suppose that I should dream of suggesting that his powers were in any way superior to your own. But, after all, what an influence he does wield!"

Nangle clicked his tongue to give emphasis to this expression of wonder.

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"Only think of what Turpin was a year or two ago, and what he is now!" he went on. "Why, the public knew nothing of him."

"It *is* wonderful," admitted the pastor, almost viciously.

"Of course, I admit it's only because he's been able to make his name known over the Education Act," resumed the tempter; "but there's no doubt that he is one of the foremost men in the country just now. Why, he'd have his pick of half the Liberal seats in England, if he cared to stand for Parliament; and just think of the influence he has behind the scenes! The leaders of the party are proud to have him at their houses. They're his obedient humble servants. Ha! ha! ha!"

The Rev. Saxon was meditating and he made no answer, but a mere glance at his face convinced me that Nangle had triumphed. "If Dr. Turpin, why not Dr. Dawes?" was written upon it in legible characters.

"You think Mr. Orme understood me to give a promise last night?" he said at last.

"Not a doubt of it, my dear friend. Of course, if you think you oughtn't to do it, that must make no difference; but I hope you won't ask me to go and tell him."

"But I will do it," said the pastor, rising to his feet. His doubts had all vanished by this time. His face was flushed and his protuberant blue eyes

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were on fire. In imagination he saw himself controlling the destinies of the Empire.

I was too busy a man to spend my time in trying to persuade a Nonconformist minister of ripe years that he had no more judgment than a child, but after the two had gone, my conscience smote me a little for not having made a last attempt to keep the poor little man out of mischief.

"It really was good of him to refuse to blackmail that auctioneer," I said to myself. "There arn't many poorish men of any calling, who'd refuse the chance of snatching at a bit of money, if it were dangled within reach; and here it was a case of smiting the Amalekites. I suppose, by-the-by, that Nangle was to be the other party to the bill of sale. Well, well! I dare say no great harm will come of the job."

When, that evening, I sat smoking a last pipe over my bachelor hearth, my thoughts turned to the demoniacal adroitness with which the church-officer had appealed to his pastor's vanity, and I laughed to think of the reverend gentleman's ambitions. I knew that I had found my own niche in the world, and that on the whole, I was satisfied with it; so I was free to laugh at another man's wild dreams.

"It's hard to know one's place when that place is a humble one," said I, with a dim remembrance of the Temple barber in *Sweet Lavender*.

CHAPTER II

I do not propose to put on record the precise shade of Dr. Dawes' nonconformity ; nor shall I set forth the name of the suburb, which is the scene of his pastoral labours. I will call the place Temsley, and will merely add that it forms part of one of the parliamentary divisions of the county.

It was quite by chance that I found myself in the neighbourhood, some three or four months after my interview with the reverend gentleman and his officer. In the outskirts of Temsley is an old red-brick house, whereof for some years during the Protectorate, Richard Cromwell was the tenant. My friend, Mr. James C. Fairfield, of Chicago, U.S.A., who is a keen topographist and a saunterer in the by-ways of literature, had looked in upon me one afternoon to announce that he was on his way to this shrine ; whereupon I, being slack of work, had consented to make holiday with him.

I had noticed in the newspapers a week or two before, that the member for the division was dead, and that Mr. Bellamy Orme was standing in the radical interest, but I found very little in the streets

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of Temsley to suggest that a contest was in progress. Here and there, however, we came upon a specimen of the usual electioneering literature, and once I insisted on stopping to read a poster, which set forth Mr. Orme's address. I take no interest in party politics, but I felt sure that the Education Act must be referred to, and I thought it would be interesting to see what that truly spiritual person had to say upon the religious question. I laughed so immoderately while I was perusing his observations, that Mr. Fairfield, who had been passing hither and thither in a fever of impatience to be gone, came back to my side and demanded the cause of my merriment.

We had once talked over the subject of Passive Resistance, and he had told me that the movement was exciting a certain mild wonderment in the States, where according to his account, the points of difference between the Episcopal Church and most of the other religious bodies are even less marked than they are in this country. In the course of our talk, I had mentioned that a practice of alienating goods and chattels in order to defeat the rating authorities, was growing up among the more progressive members of the cult.

"Is that the regulation attitude of your parliamentary opposition?" he asked, as soon as he had read Mr. Orme's fulminations.

"There or thereabouts, I fancy."

"With whom does this sort of stuff go down?"

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"The whole party seems to swallow it."

"Of course, of course! it bring votes. What I mean is: who really feels that there's a grievance of the kind suggested here? If what this candidate says is true, the Convention Act and the Five Mile Act were nothing to it. An ordinary man's common sense must revolt at that."

"Do your countrymen show any sense of proportion in their party politics?" I inquired.

Mr. Fairfield considered the question, and then laughed.

"It's a dirty trade everywhere," was all he said.

We were on our way back to the station, after having inspected the old house, and also, I may remark in passing, after a leisurely perambulation of the hamlet generally, with many stoppages before ancient buildings, especially taverns, when I heard my name called from the other side of the road, and there I saw the Rev. Saxon Dawes, waving me a friendly greeting. He was the centre of a little knot of people, whom he had evidently been haranguing, but the next moment he had broken loose and was shaking me by the hand.

"So glad, so glad!" he panted; "but I mustn't stay a minute. Couldn't let you go by without a word, though. Great doings here, just now!"

"My friend, Mr. Fairfield," said I, presenting my companion, who was gazing down into the little man's excited face, with more surprise than

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it is his wont to display over anything less moving than a topographical discovery.

"Perhaps your friend won't care to know me, when I tell him that, in all probability, I shall be in prison before the end of the week," said the reverend gentleman, with an excited laugh.

"Dr. Dawes is a Passive Resister," I explained.

Mr. Fairfield had bowed when I introduced him. Now he bowed again, and he put out his hand with grave dignity.

"It gives me much pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir," he said. "Have I really the honour of meeting a minister of religion, who is about to sacrifice his liberty for conscience' sake? I am myself, a descendant of the Pilgrim Fathers," he added, to my great astonishment.

"A sympathizer indeed! Surely not one of our brethren from across the Atlantic?" cried the pastor. Mr. Fairfield bowed again.

My friend is a bit of a humourist, but there is nothing in his countenance to suggest this. He stands above the middle height, and when his spare, elderly figure bends low, he is very impressive indeed.

"Delightful, delightful! At any other time I should insist upon being allowed to improve our acquaintance, but I was making certain arrangements for this evening when I caught sight of our friend here; and really, really!——"

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The little man was in a fever of excitement, and he broke off to make wild gestures to his forsaken audience. It was easy to see that they were inclined to resent his having deserted them so unceremoniously.

"I must go ; I must go !" he ejaculated, wringing Mr. Fairfield by the hand ; "but take these, my dear sir ! Perhaps you and our friend may be able to support us. Till then ; farewell and God bless you !"

He thrust two tickets upon my companion, and with a frenzied good-bye to me and a lift of his hat to both of us, he darted across the road.

There was a faint gleam of amusement in Mr. Fairfield's eyes, as through his *pince-nez* he scanned the group opposite. The Rev. Saxon was gesticulating wildly and talking nineteen to the dozen, but the road was so wide that his excited whisper reached us as a mere hiss.

"Mostly church-workers, I guess," was my friend's comment, as we resumed our stroll.

"For how long are these good people imprisoned, if they denude themselves of all their worldly goods ?" he asked.

"One day I think—perhaps a few days in some cases."

"And in order to qualify for that martyrdom, they have to go through all that legal machinery, you were telling me about the other day ?"

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"Yes; as I understand the matter they have to give a bill of sale. Or, by-the-by, they can make a deed of gift."

"I suppose the thing's a mere pretence, whichever way it's done."

"I suppose so. What are those tickets?" Mr. Fairfield was beginning to study them when I asked this question, and I saw that he was waxing mirthful in his solemn way.

"They are for the tea-meeting this evening. It would be a sin to miss it."

"If you're going, you'll go alone," said I, stoutly.

"I don't know that the tea part has any great attraction for me;" said Mr. Fairfield; "but I must go to the meeting. Just listen to this.—*The subsequent proceedings will be of the nature of a send-off to our beloved pastor; it being practically certain that ere the next Lord's day, he will be sent to gaol, like a common felon, for conscience' sake. Note. Mr. Bellamy Orme, K.C., the Liberal candidate for the Division, will be present.*"

"But you promised to get back to town in good time, and dine with me," I grumbled.

"We can dine any day; but never again may we have the chance of seeing a Christian community bid farewell to its pastor on his going to gaol for conscience' sake. The mere thought of it," said Mr. Fairfield, dreamily, "stirs my blood like a trumpet-blast."

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"But we must have something to eat."

"There's just nice time to stroll to Rolleston; that's about two miles. We can find some cyclists' inn there, and we can get back here by half-past seven. The tea will be over by then; it begins at half-past six."

This programme was duly carried out, but though it was nearly eight o'clock when we entered the chapel schoolroom, the clearing away after the feast was yet in progress. The food and crockery had disappeared, but there were still some boards and trestles to be disposed of. We had hoped to step in unobserved, but no sooner had Mr. Fairfield's tall figure crossed the threshold, than Dr. Dawes caught sight of him. In a moment he had made his way to us, almost breathless with excitement.

"So glad, so glad! I felt sure you would come," he exclaimed, as he seized my friend's hand.

"I simply could not keep away," was the gratifying answer.

"You must break bread with us—you *must* break bread with us," cried the pastor, turning on his heel and darting away.

"But I am not an hungered, thank you!"

Though Mr. Fairfield jerked this out in a high voice and with much nervous energy, his plea was all in vain, for the Rev. Saxon had vanished through a side door. Presently he bustled out, carrying a Bath bun and a cup of coffee.

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"You follow me: you follow me!" he panted. "You must come upon the platform, my dear Mr. Fairchild. So must you," he added, grasping me by the hand. "I didn't see you before. So sorry!"

The platform was a large one; and behind the usual table and its appurtenances were several rows of ladies and gentlemen, seated upon chairs. Just below, some one was playing the "Men of Harlech" upon an American organ of considerable power.

"You are very kind," said I, much pleased at the prospect of beholding Mr. Fairfield seated conspicuous in the front row, while he broke bread, a solitary feeder, to the strains of his national instrument. I even ventured to hope that he would be called upon for a speech later on.

But the descendant of the Pilgrim Fathers was not disposed to make an exhibition of himself in this fashion.

"I will sit here, thank you," he said, dropping into a chair, that chanced to be empty, and directing a humorous glance at me.

The pastor was about to remonstrate, but at that moment somebody near us drew his attention to a beckoning hand. The summons was apparently an urgent one; for without another word he handed over the refreshments to my companion and dashed off. There was no mistaking the reverence in the eyes of his flock, as he threaded his way towards the platform.

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The chair occupied by Mr. Fairfield was the last of a row, and for a moment he sat there somewhat forlornly, with the cup and saucer in one hand and the plate in the other. I heard a subdued feminine laugh from somewhere near at hand, and I felt sure that he had heard it too.

"Give me the plate, while you drink some coffee!" I whispered. "Then I'll take the cup, and you can have some of the bun—change and change about, you know."

He received this suggestion with a twinkling eye; but instead of adopting it, he deposited bun and plate under his chair. This dexterous manœuvre provoked another subdued laugh, and I caught the words—"Friends of Dr. Dawes." A little commotion followed, which ended in the chair next to my friend's, being left vacant. He mumbled a few words of thanks, and moving up one, made room for me. His next proceeding was to get rid of the cup and saucer by putting them under his new seat.

The organ was now discoursing "Scots wha hae," and many feet were tapping in time to the melody.

"What do you suppose that elegant old ruin is?" whispered my companion.

I followed the direction of his gaze, fully expecting to see Mr. Fitzroy Nangle; and sure enough, there he was; more youthfully dandified than ever, and wearing in his buttonhole a huge bunch of white flowers.

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"He's an office-holder of some kind: the pastor's right-hand man," I answered.

"What a gay Lothario!" was the next whisper.

We had both been watching Mr. Nangle as he skipped about from one lady to another; bowing, smirking and gesticulating, more like a thing on wires than a human being. He had nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles for all and sundry; here and there, a dear sister was patted on arm or shoulder; and in not a few cases, a fair hand was held captive between the church-officer's palms, and pressed against his waistcoat.

"Mighty popular, too," sneered Mr. Fairfield, turning up his nose.

"He's not such a fool as he looks."

As I said this, the music ceased. *Hush! hus-s-sh!* *hus-s-sh!* sounded from various parts of the school-room, and a dead silence followed. A moment later, the Rev. Saxon was mounting the platform steps, with Nangle and three or four others in his wake. There was loud applause when the pastor turned his face to the audience, and many handkerchiefs were waved. Some of these were of yellow silk, the Radical colour, and not a few of the ladies and gentlemen present wore favours of the same hue.

The proceedings, which followed, were a very queer mixture of religion and party politics. In the reverend gentleman's opening prayer, the keynote of the gathering was struck by an oblique

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reference to St. Paul and the gaoler of Philippi, which the audience acknowledged by a sound not unlike a subdued hiss. Before this mention of St. Paul, the prayer had been used as a vehicle for the announcement that, owing to a temporary indisposition, Mr. Bellamy Orme had found it impossible to be present. When this was followed by a hope that on the morrow, "Thy servant, the candidate for this division of our beloved county," would be sufficiently restored to health to enable him to pursue his canvass, and a chorus of amens sounded from all parts of the room, Mr. Fairfield so far forgot himself as to raise his head, in order to make sure that I was paying due attention to all that was going on !

After the prayer came a hymn, and after that, a speech from a thin and voluble young lady with fluffy hair and an aggressive *pince-nez*. The chairman introduced her to the meeting as a member of the council of certain federated sisterhoods of political workers, bearing a name which I did not catch. It was a long and breathless oration in support of Mr. Orme, hot and strong all through, and particularly highly spiced in regard to the Education Act ; but it contained no reference to the special object of the meeting, and it lasted for so long that I began to wonder whether Mr. Fairfield had not been lured thither under false pretences.

At last, however, this terrible harangue came to an end.

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"I will now call upon one whom, I am sure, we are all longing to hear—our dear brother Nangle," announced the pastor; and at the sound of his name the church-officer sprang to his feet, waving an enormous yellow handkerchief. In his progress from a chair, some distance in rear of the president, he made a pause, to bow in answer to the roar of welcome which greeted him, and then he ambled forward with the gait of a buffoon, and the set smile of a merry-andrew. He struck his flag when he reached the front, but for a moment or two, he kept up the wagging of his head and the dancing movement of his feet. The applause was deafening.

Brother Nangle began his speech by begging leave to ask the ladies a riddle—a riddle which the gentlemen in the audience must pretend not to hear. There was an arch waggishness in his manner, which set my teeth on edge, and brought a scowl of disgust to Mr. Fairfield's visage; but, with a few exceptions, all the people about us were in ecstacies. The church-officer was evidently a prime favourite and something of a chartered libertine; for, though here and there, I noticed an uneasy and half-protesting smile, it was evident that the bulk of the audience had steeled themselves to welcome with a fearful joy, whatever wit and humour he might think fit to lay before them.

Amid a fire of titters and subdued "Oh-oh's!" Fitzroy proceeded to inquire why a lady's slipper

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was like the Archbishop of Canterbury ; but though Mr. Fairfield was busy with pencil and paper, and I dare say his record still remains, that record is not now in England, and unfortunately my memory is unable to recall the harmless but idiotic answer, which the church-officer eventually furnished.

As soon as this pleasantry was disposed of, he went straight to the heart of his subject—the woes of Passive Resisters as a class, and, in particular, the threatened imprisonment of his spiritual chief. His speech was jerky, but by no means ineffective, and what he lacked in oratory, he made up in venom. His recital of the cruel and unnatural persecution to which the reverend gentleman had been subjected, was relieved by an occasional lapse into jocularity ; but, despite this comic relief, the story, as he told it, was so moving that before he had made much progress, the air was rent with groans of wrath and sympathy. When near the close, he drew a lurid picture of the felon's cell, there were howls of indignation from the sterner sex, and many tears from the ladies. So affecting was this part of the oration to the Rev. Saxon, that he found it necessary to hide his face in his hands.

Before this, Mr. Nangle had explained, that though for reasons so well known to his hearers, that a statement of them would be wearisome, it had not been thought advisable for any one but the pastor

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to go to prison for conscience' sake, it must not be forgotten that many members of the flock had suffered a deprivation of their worldly goods, rather than bow the knee to Baal. He, himself, as was known to all of them, had surrendered a watch-chain, endeared by many tender associations, and of his brothers and sisters there present, many had made sacrifices of a like character. This, however, was a trifle; for our household gods were merely the things of this world, which, as his hearers knew so well, was not our home, but was only a sojourning place on our journey to the New Jerusalem. But there were things, so sacred in their character, as to inspire respect in the bosom of a pagan or an idolator. Could it be believed that the so-called Church of England had no such scruples? Yes, alas! He confessed that he spoke hotly; but the friends among whom he stood, would pardon his warmth—nay, they would share it!—for they would remember that our persecutors, who called themselves Christians, had not hesitated to seize and offer for sale, a book, which to every one in that room was more precious than life itself. Need he add that he was referring to the Bible, of which the P.S.A. had been so shamefully despoiled?

"He's as pious as Charles II.," whispered Mr. Fairfield, under cover of the burst of indignation which this aroused. "But what on earth is a P.S.A.?"

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"It's a guild or association for amusing or instructing working-men on Sunday afternoons; it means Pleasant Sunday Afternoons," I answered.

The church-officer brought his speech to a close by an appeal to all Christians to vote for Mr. Bellamy Orme; and as, with many bows and a profuse display of the yellow handkerchief, he retired backwards to his seat, the organ struck up the rousing melody of a revival hymn. The cheering and clapping died away, and presently a few trained voices near the instrument began to sing the words. These were frankly political in their character. The ship called *Old England*, was buffeting a tempest; her sails were torn to ribbons, and there were rocks upon her lee. The crew in their despair, upbraided the captain, who had reduced them to such straits, and called upon Providence to send them a pilot. Temsley heard the cry, and answered in a rattling chorus that Bellamy Orme was on his way to succour them.

At the end of this ditty, the organist rose, and stated that it was his privilege to make an announcement, which would perhaps come more fittingly from his lips than from those of their beloved pastor. A member of the congregation, who wished to be nameless, had composed an original poem upon a matter very near to all their hearts. This poem he, the speaker, had set to music and it would now be his privilege to submit it to the critical judgment of

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that great gathering. Certain members of the choir had been kind enough to promise him their vocal assistance, and he had only to add that copies of the words and music would immediately be brought round for sale, at the price of sixpence apiece.

"What made you think of Charles II.?" I asked of Mr. Fairfield during the lull that followed.

"I remembered that when the people of Dover presented him with a Bible, he said it was the thing that he loved above all things in the world."

"By-the-by, I feel a sort of abhorrence of that office-bearer," he went on, in a low whisper; "he makes me feel creepy—

'By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.'—

That's how he strikes me."

The original poem was called "The Better Way." At the first notes of the prelude, all the people on the platform, except the minister, stood up. This was no impulse of the moment. The serried rows behind the table sprang up like one man; and quick as lightning, all below followed suit. The effect of this act of homage was very striking. Even I was conscious of a slight thrill, as I stood up with the rest, and noted how tense and rigid all the figures were, and how every eye was bent upon the pastor in his armchair. He was pale as death; and though he lay back with his face buried in his hands, I felt sure that the tears were flowing. He maintained

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this attitude throughout the song; but near the close, I was satisfied that he had regained his self-control. Watching him closely, I felt no doubt that he had slightly opened his fingers, and was scrutinizing the audience through the chinks.

The following are the words of "The Better Way"—

The joys of earth are naught to one,
Who treads the better way;
Tho' all is bright beneath the sun
He will not pause or stay.
The gardens stretch on either hand;
The olive groves are fair,
And all about, the feathered band
Make music in the air:
But lo! he passes on to choose
The rack, the faggot, or the noose.

The spoils of earth, he spurns them all:
The jewels of the mine,
The stately lilies fair and tall,
The clusters of the vine,
The meats that smoke upon the board,
The oates of sweet delight
Can nothing but disdain afford
To one who loves the right.
He passes by them all to choose
The rack, the faggot, or the noose.

The snares of earth are naught to him:
The censor's honeyed breath,
Which rolls through the cathedral dim,
Can never dull his faith:
Tho' Satan come with many a dole,
And offer to him there,
The alb, the rochet, or the stole,
The mitre or the Chair,
He spurns them with his foot—to choose
The rack, the faggot, or the noose.

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Organ and choir waisted out a long-drawn amen ; and before this had died away, the hero of the evening had risen from his chair, and was confronting the audience below him. All were still upon their feet ; and in a flash, the lines of singers were a congregation no longer, but a surging, swaying mob, cheering and waving their handkerchiefs.

This enthusiasm was kept up for a full minute, or more, but the Rev. Saxon faced it unmoved. He stood with his arms folded and his eyes bent upon the floor, and he paid no heed to the gradual lulling of the storm. The silence that followed upon the rustle of the people seating themselves, was so profound that one could have heard a pin drop, and it was so oppressive that when at last, the words : "My friends !" boomed forth from the platform, the audience welcomed them with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

Although I knew something of my client's powers as an orator, the tornado of verbosity, which he proceeded to let loose in respect of the two shillings and threepence, which his conscience forbade him to pay to the local authorities, fairly amazed me. As he went on, the room seethed and bubbled with excitement, and he, himself, was as a reed shaken in the wind of his own eloquence.

Knowing him to be a worthy man, and honest to boot, according to his lights, one felt a sort of pity for him as he lashed himself into a fury. To listen

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to him, and doubt that, for the time being, he fully believed all that he was saying, was out of the question; and yet, was it consistent with fair average sanity, that any one should be able to so deceive himself? What were the facts of the case? It was within my own knowledge that, spurred on by vanity and evil councillors, he had pretended to denude himself of his goods for the express purpose of winning the notoriety, which imprisonment alone could give him, and to that end, he had knowingly prostituted the forms of law. Nevertheless, here he stood, posing as a martyr, and dwelling in windy boastfulness upon the ills which he had suffered, and was yet prepared to suffer, in the sacred cause of conscience. And—perhaps most wonderful of all!—here was a congregation of staid, respectable citizens, who knowing as much, or nearly as much, as I did of all that had gone before, were applauding him to the echo, and in some cases were following his rhetoric with streaming eyes. Looking hither and thither, to mark the effect of his words, I noticed that Nangle had left the platform, and had perched himself upon a table at the opposite end of the room. There he sat, swinging his legs, and eyeing his pastor with the grin of a Mephistopheles.

Now and again the minister enlarged upon the woes of the Free Churches with a wealth of illustration, which did credit to his miscellaneous reading. At one moment, those suffering churches figured as

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Andromeda, chained to the rock and awaiting rescue at the hands of Bellamy Orme. A little later, they were a martyr of the Solway, almost submerged by the rising waters. So dramatic was my client's treatment of this illustration, that, for the time being, he was the martyr and the chair behind him was the stake. I found it difficult to preserve my gravity as he nestled up to the mahogany, and enforced his description of the scene, by indicating upon his waistcoat, button by button, the inexorable rising of the advancing flood.

Mr. Fairfield assured me of his appreciation of this performance, by a gentle pressure of his elbow, but the faces of all others within my range of vision, bore a look of intense and overmastering interest.

Just then, there was a merry twinkle in my companion's eye, but before long, his merriment gave place to anger. The Rev. Saxon, *à propos* of the persecutions of a ruder and more barbarous age than ours, favoured us with a highly coloured, and by no means accurate, account of his meeting that afternoon, with a descendant of the Pilgrim Fathers ; and he went on to point out that in leaving their native land, to find across the seas a new home, in which they could worship God according to their consciences, these exiles had been guilty of a pusillanimity, which the speaker found it easy to forgive, but not easy to palliate.

"We, Free Churchmen of to-day," cried he, "will

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remain in our beloved country and beard our persecutors in their dens."

Mr. Fairfield took this reflection upon his fore-fathers extremely ill.

"Your little friend is a blithering idiot," was his wrathful whisper.

Near the end of the address, the pastor referred to the support and sympathy, which throughout all his tribulations, he had received from his dear Brother Nangle. But for that brotherly assistance, he must have faltered in his purpose of vindicating, even to the bitter end, the sacred rights of conscience; and he ventured fervently, but in all humility, to breathe a hope that when he and that good man had both departed from this mortal scene, Temsley would say of them in the sublime language of that book, which, as we all knew, had received such scant reverence at the hands of our adversaries—"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided."

The frantic applause with which this aspiration was received, seemed to wind him up to a crowning effort. In a torrent of rhetorical commonplaces, he reminded his hearers of the faithful brethren who had suffered martyrdom for conscience' sake in Queen Mary's time. Had these men died in vain? Had we forgotten Latimer's exhortation to his brother martyr? Should we, their descendants, so demean ourselves as to justify posterity in declaring that the

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martyrs of the twentieth century were unworthy of their forefathers ? No ! ten thousand times no ! True it was, alas ! that the dark days of persecution had once more closed upon our native land, but now, as in the sixteenth century, the darkness would pass away. Standing before us on that platform, even as three hundred years agone, Latimer was standing at the stake in picturesque old Oxford town, he, our pastor, could assure us that the light must once again come back ; and even as Latimer at that sublime moment, spoke to Ridley words of hope and comfort, so would he, our pastor, speak the like words to one, who had cheered and comforted him throughout all his afflictions. Verily, he would cry aloud to him—"Be of good cheer, Brother Nangle ! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Before the audience had time to give expression to their feelings, a shrill, "Yea verily, brother !" sounded from the other end of the room ; and there stood Brother Nangle, mounted upon the table, and waving the yellow handkerchief like one possessed.

A dead silence followed, and every eye was riveted upon the church-officer. Then, prompted by the organ, the pent-up emotion broke forth like the roar of a great sea—

" Oh God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!"

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I heard no more than the first four lines. ‘Where’s the back door?’ hissed Mr. Fairfield in my ear, and I was seized in a grip which forced me out of my chair. An instant later, we were outside, where a full moon was shining on the school-room walls, and the host of yellow bills plastered upon them—*Vote for Bellamy Orme!*

“I’m glad you told him that you claimed descent from the Pilgrim Fathers,” said I, gratefully. “That got us the tickets.” But a snort of anger and contempt was my companion’s only answer.

Not one word did he utter until we were well on our homeward journey. We had the railway carriage to ourselves.

“And I suppose I’m a Nonconformist, if I’m anything at all,” he wailed, as soon as he had found his tongue.

“Surely,” I murmured, “a person of your ancestry ought to sympathize with these good folks. Conscience, conscience, conscience!”

Mr. Fairfield uttered another vehement snort.

“Aren’t they descendants of the Ironsides?” I asked.

“That’s just what I’ve been thinking. That’s what makes it so utterly incomprehensible. There’s not one single point of resemblance.”

“Not even one? Did you notice how they laughed at Brother Nangle’s jokes?”

“Ah!—the rudimentary sense of humour, you

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mean. Yes, the Puritans certainly weren't very nimble jokers : Oliver himself, was a bit of a buffoon."

"They've got a Milton, anyhow," said I, later on, when my friend was lying back in his corner and smiling over "The Better Way."

"It's a spirit-stirring poem, especially where it hints that your little windbag had the refusal of the Papal chair," sneered Mr. Fairfield. "And then that rhyme to 'choose' in the chorus! That's a sweet boon. The rack and the faggot are right enough. They make one think of the Tower and Smithfield, and sufferings for righteousness' sake—very stuff o' the conscience, in fact. But the noose! That suggests crime—mere Newgate and Jack Sheppard. And, speaking of the conscience, isn't it a terrible thing that a body of good folk like your Nonconformists, should make the word stink, as they have done over this education business ? "

"It's only the Passive Resisters. Lots of Dissenters hate the movement. Why, I know several who simply loathe it. By-the-by, what made you bolt off in such a rage just at that particular moment? We'd sat through plenty of stuff quite as bad."

"It was that hymn. I was brought up on Dr. Watts, and we used to sing that hymn every Sunday evening after family prayers. I hated it at the time, because the prayers were so tedious, and they came just before supper, but I've a sort of affection for it now. I could have stood anything but that hymn."

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"I can make excuses for the pastor," he exclaimed, after a long silence. "He's a nervy subject; but that Nangle, he's simply diabolical."

"I fancy Mr. Bellamy Orme's quite as much to blame as Nangle for this imprisonment business."

"Herod and Pontius Pilate are agreed," said my friend, solemnly; and then, knowing that the allusion must be incomprehensible to me, he burst forth into poetry—

"The Presbyter and Independent seed
Spring with broad blades, to make religion bleed;
Herod and Pontius Pilate are agreed."

"They say that Charles the First wrote that," he explained.

CHAPTER III

MR. FAIRFIELD made it his business to procure a copy of the next two issues of the *Temsley Sentinel*. From the first of these, we learned that the Rev. Saxon Dawes had made his appearance before the justices, who, notwithstanding an eloquent harangue, which filled several columns of the paper, had sentenced him to two days' imprisonment. It further appeared that upon the morrow, the reverend gentleman, clad in the blood-red doctorial robes of Rosherville, had made a triumphal progress to the gaol, escorted by a vast concourse of Nonconformists from all parts of the country, "many of whom were in private carriages." There had, of course, been plenty of speechifying on this occasion. The *Sentinel*, which is a Radical organ, discussed the matter in a leader, and assured its readers that the return of Mr. Bellamy Orme was now so certain that the more sporting members of the Church party, who earlier in the contest, had betted six to one in favour of their own candidate, were at last constrained to admit that the odds had veered round in Mr. Orme's favour, and were hedging accordingly.

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Time, however, proved that the newspaper was a false prophet; for Mr. Orme came out second at the poll, by some two or three hundred votes. The *Sentinel* of the Saturday following enlarged upon the greatness of his moral victory, and was eloquent upon the subject of his moral virtues, but it went on to rebuke him with some acerbity, because, in seconding the usual vote of thanks to the returning officer, he had described his successful opponent as a thundering good chap, and had congratulated the electors upon their wisdom in having given him a majority. A speech of this character was, as the editor pointed out, a matter for regret, as it justified an inference that, in the speaker's opinion, politics were a mere game, and thereby gave offence to people, who took a serious view of their electoral responsibilities.

Mr. Bellamy Orme is a member of the club to which I belong, and for a good many years past I have been on easy terms with him. A claim arising out of a certain *bijou* residence upon the Upper Thames, was the means of bringing us together in the first instance. My client was the creditor, and it was my painful duty to apply to Mr. Orme for payment of the account. When, at his request, I called on him at the Temple to discuss the matter he made merry over the excellent defence, which the law afforded him, but he followed this up by an offer to liquidate the debt by instalments; and, to do him justice, all the instalments were duly paid.

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"So you didn't quite pull it off," I said, when, a few weeks after the election, I found myself alone with him in the little smoking-room.

Bellamy Orme laughed, and fired off a few easy curses at the party organization and the electors' broken promises; and he vowed that nothing would prevail upon him to go through the wear and tear of another contest.

"I heard something about it from a client of mine, Dr. Saxon Dawes," said I.

"Oh yes, the little bounder who went to prison for conscience' sake. That was a clinking good bit of business, though I was beaten."

"He worked for you, too; didn't he? A very fine speaker, I'm told. In fact, I've heard him.'

"Nineteen to the dozen; if not more. But it isn't cackle of that sort which wins elections."

"I know another of your workers—Brother Nangle."

The learned counsel burst into a roar of laughter. "He's a sly old rat! I admit he's a rum 'un to look at—I'm not partial myself to sky-blue neckties, or scent, either—but, as a helper, he's worth a dozen of your dissenting minister. He and I came to an understanding months ago. By-the-by, wasn't it you who refused to draw that bill of sale? I remember; I remember! Dawes insisted on going to you; so Nangle went with him to see that you didn't corrupt his mind."

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"I guessed what had happened! Who did draw the thing, after all?"

"Those people who act for all the Passive Resisters—Higgenson and something. They've got some funds behind them."

"Higgenson and Flint: I know them. I suppose you heard that I didn't get on well with Brother Nangle?"

"I got on first-rate. We came to terms in no time. He'd got a little axe to grind in the way of his business. As soon as that was arranged, we were like brothers. We used to talk like it too—Nonconformist brothers, I mean."

"What is he?"

"Oh, he runs two or three furniture shops. He sells rotten stuff to young couples, on the hire system. You know the sort of thing: *Walk up! walk up, ladies and gentlemen! Buy what you want, and pay when you dam' please!* That's his line."

"And did you have to walk up?"

Orme's answer to this suggestion was a grin, and a humorous malediction upon his brother's eyes.

"But surely some one had to walk up."

"What he was after, was an introduction to my old friend Tony Aston. He was just taking on the management of the Snapdragon theatre. Nangle wanted an order for stage furniture, or something of that kind—decorations, perhaps."

"Did he get any good out of it?"

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The man's gross person rumbled with merriment.
"Not a ha'porth. But I was bound to see that he came to no harm. I know friend Tony's little ways. Nangle's as sharp as a razor in his own line, but he doesn't understand actors. He'd have been had in no time."

"That wouldn't have done at all, before the election."

"Of course it wouldn't. So I made Tony understand how matters stood, and he swore he wouldn't play any tricks. And he promised to take Brother Nangle 'behind.' I knew that 'ud suit him down to the ground. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But why was Nangle worth all that trouble?"

"He's got the sixty or seventy votes of the P.S.A. men in his pocket. He runs that show all by himself at Temsley, and he spends a pretty penny over it. The men vote just as he tells 'em. He wanted me to drop in on the Sunday before the election. Not to talk politics—oh dear no! Just to have a friendly chat with the honest toilers!"

"Did you go?"

"I'd other fish to fry that afternoon. 'No, no, Brother Nangle,' said I, '*Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do.*'"

"Have they got another Bible yet?"

When I asked this question, Orme was standing upon the rug, adjusting a very crumpled white tie in the looking-glass.

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"Do you know that yarn!" he exclaimed, wheeling round in astonishment. "Surely it hasn't travelled up to London?"

"That was Nangle's fake," he explained, with a chuckle, that ended in a yawn. "He's the tenant of the P.S.A. room; and, of course, he made the authorities distrain for the rate; one and threepence was the amount. Well, he gets the place all ready for them by clearing every blessed stick out of it, except that Bible. They couldn't help seizing it—there wasn't anything else. And as soon as it's sold, he raises the devil's own dust about the sacrilege they've committed. And the way he made the fur fly, about that outrage upon Christian people's feelings, was enough to make a cat laugh. He worked the oracle over and over again. And his little pastor wasn't far behind him."

"Did he know how the thing had been engineered?"

"I suppose he took Nangle's version. But did you ever come across a minister, or a parson either, for that matter, who couldn't believe anything he wanted to?"

"It's getting near my bedtime," said I, rising.

"I wish I was going to bed too," grumbled Tony Aston's old friend, as he stretched himself and yawned, till his great jowl hid the crumpled necktie; "but there's no bed for me, yet awhile. I'm going to the Owlets'; it's their house-supper to-night. I'm

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in the chair, worse luck ! What a roasting they're giving me over that election ! " he went on, between his yawns. " Teddy Beagle's got a song about it : he's one of the corner-men there—

' What an enormity !
Bellamy Orme-ity
Learning the letters, that spell Nonconformity ! '

Damned smart ; isn't it ? Good night ! "

The next time that I met the unsuccessful candidate was some few months later. I was passing through the Temple on my way to the Embankment, one afternoon near the middle of the Long Vacation, when I came upon him hard by the fountain. He was smoking a cigar and watching the birds frolic in the spray. In loud tweeds and panama hat, he looked as he stood there, with the sun shining full upon his great red face, more like an elderly comic actor or sporting publican than one of his Majesty's counsel learned in the law. He happened to catch sight of me, and he promptly rent the air with a genial bellow of my name.

" Well ; Brother Nangle's done it at last," he said laughing, as I walked up to him.

" What's he done ? "

" Haven't you seen the report ? "

" I've been out of town ; I haven't looked at the newspaper much."

" He was up at Bow Street for forgery, two or three days ago. They caught him on board ship

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at Southampton, just as he was slipping away—just as he thought he was safe!"

Here Orme had to break off to enjoy the full comicality of Brother Nangle's disappointment and surprise.

"I don't know whether he was in disguise," he went on, after a low rumbling laugh. "Nangle got up in a white beard and green spectacles would be a sight worth seeing. By-the-by, he forgot he was a Passive Resister. The old sportsman fought like a tiger when the detective tapped him on the shoulder."

"Is it a clear case?" I asked.

"Clear as daylight; and the best of the joke is, he had the audacity to send to me as soon as he was brought back to town. 'Would I have the great kindness to come and see him, as soon as possible?'"

"Perhaps he wanted you to defend him."

"I've no doubt he did—and as a friend, too," sneered the learned gentleman, tapping his nose. "'No, no, Brother Nangle,' thought I, 'the labourer is worthy of his hire.' So I sent back a message that he'd better consult his solicitor. How the constable did roar when I told him what to say!"

"I wonder he understood the joke."

"He knew as well as I did that Nangle wouldn't be able to find a solicitor. He's got no money, you see. The police got hold of all he had about him at

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Southampton, and solicitors don't give credit to bankrupts—at least my clients don't. Ha-ha-ha!"

"When was he made bankrupt?"

"That was weeks ago. I wondered what was up, when my clerk told me he'd been inquiring for me, just before the vacation. 'Find out what he wants,' I said. He came again, but nothing could be got out of him; so he didn't get at me. What he wanted was to borrow money, I'll be bound."

The humour of the suggestion was so patent, and Orme's appreciation of it was so keen, that I could not help joining in his merriment.

"Damned good; wasn't it?" he went on, not in the least offended. "Well, he gave that up, and I heard nothing more of him till I got his message from the gaol last Friday. It was then I heard of his bankruptcy—the constable told me. And he told me a few other little things about him: very interesting little things. I dare say some of 'em are public property by now. I wonder what the people at that chapel think of Brother Nangle."

"Well, they can hardly say that *he's* in prison as a martyr."

"You wouldn't feel so sure of that, if you'd seen as much of them as I have. It's my belief they've come to the conclusion that he did it all for conscience' sake, or else they're swearing that he's the victim of a conspiracy on the part of the bishops."

"No, no! they're a business community. They

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won't be making a martyr of Brother Nangle," said I, turning off to pursue my way.

I did not give a thought to the bill of sale that afternoon, though my mind ran a good deal on Brother Nangle's fall. Next day, however, it rushed to my memory when the Rev. Saxon appeared in Gray's Inn with woe and consternation written upon his face.

There is little doing in my business during the Long Vacation, and when he arrived my clerks had all gone. I answered the knock myself.

"Have you heard the news about Mr. Nangle?" he gasped, as soon as he saw me. He had not crossed the threshold or shaken hands.

"Yes; I heard it yesterday afternoon."

"There's a man in possession in my house."

"Come in, and tell me all about it."

As soon as we were inside and he had taken a chair, I could see that he was making a great effort to calm himself.

"I've been away on the Continent for six weeks," he began, as he wiped his forehead. "My throat was troublesome and the doctor ordered me away. I heard of the bankruptcy when I was at Lucerne. I needn't say how much it grieved me. I was at Antwerp on my way home, the day before yesterday, when I got a telegram from my housekeeper to come back at once. I got home early this morning, and I found a man in possession. He was asleep in my bed——"

A Passive Resister

The reverend gentleman was so moved when he mentioned this indignity that he came to a standstill. I saw his lips quiver.

"Never mind the details," I said snappishly. I thought that a little irritability might steady him and avert a breakdown.

The poor little man gulped; and he begged my pardon so humbly that I could hardly forbear to beg his. It was some moments before he could resume his parable.

"When I asked the man what he was doing in my house, he said he represented Mr. Nangle's trustee in bankruptcy——"

"Let me ask you a few questions," I broke in.
"Did you execute that bill of sale, after all?"

"Yes I did."

"To Nangle?"

"Yes."

"Did you have a copy of it?"

"No!"

"Do you remember what it contained?"

"Not a word."

"Did any money pass?"

"No!"

"Who is the trustee's solicitor?" I asked, after thinking the matter over.

"I don't know."

"Then we can't do anything to-day. It's too late to search at the Bankruptcy Court. If you come here

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to-morrow, I shall know something by then, and we can consider what is to be done."

"But what am I to do in the meanwhile?" he asked very miserably. "I don't want to go home, with that man there."

"I'm not fit to be seen anywhere," he went on; "I'm quite ashamed to be about like this; but what could I do ? '

His appearance was, certainly, not a little disreputable for a Dissenting minister. He was in tweeds and a dark flannel shirt, for one thing, and his collar and white tie were ignominiously unclean. And, apart from his raiment, he looked very unlike his usual self. His hair was in disorder, and his woe-begone countenance was bilious and sallow. It showed, too, a ripe growth of sandy stubble.

"I left Antwerp in a hurry," he explained. "I'd come on from Brussels; and when I got to the hotel, I found the telegram. I'd only just time to catch the boat to Harwich. We had a terrible passage after we got out of the Scheldt. I don't think I ever spent such a trying night."

"I suppose you were too much taken aback, to refit at home," I remarked.

"I ought to have tidied up a bit, but I was so upset when I found I couldn't change my clothes, that I forgot all about it. I rushed up to town without giving it a thought."

The reverend gentleman said this shamefacedly,

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and as he spoke, he made a vain attempt to comb back his hair with his fingers.

"But why couldn't you change your clothes?"

This question seemed to strike a tender chord in my poor client's bosom. He had to give another gulp before he could answer it.

"Well, you see, the man was in possession of all the things in my bedroom."

"But hadn't you your luggage with you?"

"He wasn't sure that I was entitled to use the things in my portmanteau."

I knew next to nothing of the powers and duties of the trustee's agent; but this struck me as being something quite out of the common.

"But did he claim your portmanteau?" I asked, in astonishment.

"He was very nice about it. He said he only wanted to do his duty, and he was sure I didn't wish him to do otherwise. Well, I couldn't gainsay that —could I?"

"I wonder you didn't change your clothes without saying anything to him."

"But he was in my bedroom. I let myself into the house with my latchkey, and it was only when I got upstairs that I knew the man was there at all. It did give me a shock."

"So it was he, who told you what had happened?"

"Yes; he told me. And when I said I must go to town as soon as I had changed my clothes, he said

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he was afraid he mustn't let me take anything out of the house. He said, over and over again, how very sorry he was, and that he hoped I shouldn't try to make him strain his conscience. Of course, I said I wouldn't do that, on any account."

"Queer talk for a bailiff!" thought I.

"Then the question arose as to my portmanteau. I had carried it up with me, you see. I asked if I might treat that as my own."

"What did he say?"

"He wasn't quite sure. He said the point was a new one in his experience, and he wished he had his book to refer to. Unfortunately he hadn't brought it with him. He seemed quite surprised that I hadn't got it."

"What was the book?" I asked, still very much puzzled.

"I think he called it 'Coke upon the Constitution.' He said it was the book all sheriff's officers swore by."

"But if the point was doubtful, why shouldn't you have the benefit of the doubt?"

"The way he put it was this. If my portmanteau belonged to the trustee in bankruptcy, it stood to reason that I shouldn't like to be treating it as mine. It makes you hesitate when a man talks like that. It was, he said, a matter of conscience, and he must leave me to decide it."

"Conscience again!" thought I.

A Passive Resister

"Well, the end of it was, while I was hesitating, he said he saw I wished him to take charge until the Court had tried the question, and decided whether the clothes belonged to me or the trustee, and that in the mean time, he would be happy to hold the portmanteau as stakeholder, and without prejudice to any question. Then he sat down on it, and I didn't care to argue with him. The truth is, I didn't like to stay any longer. He was in his nightshirt, and I fancied he was a little uncomfortable on that account."

"Strange proceedings," said I, sorely tempted to laugh.

"But I'm sure he's a good man," continued the minister. "He said that if it was my custom to have family prayer, he would ask leave to be present, if I could wait until he had dressed himself and made his private devotions. And, as I went downstairs, I heard him singing a hymn."

"But, if you hurried up to town, how was it you didn't get here till four o'clock in the afternoon?"

"I wanted to see the solicitors who prepared the bill of sale," he answered, with a blush. "I had to wait more than two hours before I could see any one in authority."

"Was he able to give you any comfort?"

"All he would say was that it was a very painful case of misplaced confidence, and that he was afraid I must buy the goods in. But, you see, I couldn't raise the value of my furniture at any time, and just

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at present I'm particularly short. The holiday has cost so much. But when I told him I hadn't the money, he only said that in that case, no doubt my flock would help me."

"And will they, if the worst comes to the worst?"

Here I had evidently touched another tender chord; for the Rev. Saxon made no answer, and, once again, I noticed a suspicious trembling of his lips.

"I don't think I can rely upon that," he said at length. "The truth is, Mr. Nangle owes money to a good many of them, and they're quite inveterate against him. I'm very much afraid they're inclined to blame me too, because there was such a close friendship between us. That's very unjust."

As he said this he turned his head away; and though I pretended to busy myself with some papers, I saw him produce a grimy handkerchief and wipe his eyes.

"But how can you be sure of that?" I asked, in a matter-of-fact way, as soon as I thought it safe to question him. "Did you meet any of them this morning?"

"No; but I had some very painful letters while I was in Switzerland. I'm afraid there's quite a bitter feeling against me in Temsley, just now."

When I recalled that enraptured gathering of a few months before, I could understand how terrible this change of attitude must seem to a man of his temperament.

A Passive Resister

"That's so unjust that it will wear off in no time," said I. "Why, this unpleasant business about the bill of sale will have one good result. It will show them that you're a sufferer too."

This attempt at consolation proved a failure. "I'm afraid they'll only say it serves me right for making so much of him," he answered. "But I must try and live it down. It would be such a grief to me to have to make a change. I've done my best there for nearly seven years now; and everything was *so* pleasant until this happened."

"Look here!" I decided. "You must go to an hotel for to-night; you certainly can't go home. You must get a few things to go on with, and then you'll be all right. In years to come you'll laugh over the little difficulty you're in now."

"I don't want to go home if I can help it," he answered, with some hesitation; "but the truth is I've got no money. I ran short at Brussels. There was a post-office order to come to me at Antwerp, but it hadn't arrived when I got to the hotel. I'd barely enough money to pay my fare home. At the present moment I've only got threepence."

I thought it well to receive this as a good joke. Fortunately, such loose money as I had about me was more than sufficient for his needs.

"Come here at about twelve to-morrow," I said, as I let him out; "and we'll see what can be done."

I noticed that he went downstairs bare-headed,

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and it struck me that, throughout our interview, I had seen nothing of his hat. When I leaned out of the window and saw him emerge from the doorway, I understood why he had kept his head-gear in the background. It was a small cloth cap.

CHAPTER IV

FORTUNATELY for me, old Peacock, my body-clerk and factotum, was not out of town. I hustled him off the first thing next morning, to search the register of bills of sale, and ascertain who was the solicitor for the trustee in Nangle's bankruptcy. He came back with certain particulars, and with the information that the trustee's solicitors were Messrs. Priestleys and Carlyon, of the Old Vicarage House in the City. I was glad to hear this; for Carlyon, the senior partner, had been an acquaintance of mine—almost a friend, in fact—for five and twenty years, and I knew him to be a straightforward and honourable man, albeit not a little addicted to the pleasures of the table, and somewhat lacking in refinement withal.

"Ring up Mr. Carlyon on the telephone," said I, "and ask when he can see me. Tell him what it's about."

Peacock came back in a few minutes, grinning from ear to ear. This rather surprised me; for he had listened with much sympathy to such particulars of Dr. Dawes' predicament as I had thought fit to give him.

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"What does he say?" I asked.

"Mr. Carlyon came to the telephone himself, sir, and when I told him that you wanted to see him about Dr. Dawes' bill of sale, I heard him laugh. Mr. Carlyon has rather a loud laugh, sir."

"I know it—a regular bellow."

"Well, he laughed a good deal, and then he asked who I was. When I said 'Peacock,' he said I was to tell you, with his compliments, that evil communications corrupted good manners, and he couldn't congratulate you on your client. Then he said he should be in all the afternoon after half-past two, and that when you came, you must be sure to bring your hymn-book with you. He's a very amusing gentleman, sir."

Peacock has known Carlyon for nearly as long as I have, and he has a great admiration for him. He also regards him as a prodigy of wit and humour.

"Then, sir, I ventured to say that I hoped he would do what he could for the poor little gentleman, as we were all very sorry for him. And then, sir—he-hee-hee!"

I had to wait till my henchman had finished his laugh, before I was favoured with the witticism which had provoked it.

"And then, sir, he pretended to think I was crying, and he said I'd better cheer myself up by going into the gardens and spreading my tail in the sun. 'The terrace is just the place for you this

A Passive Resister

morning, Peacock,' says he. 'I wish I could come and have a look at you.' Hee-hee-hee!"

On the stroke of twelve, Dr. Dawes presented himself. He still wore the tweed suit, but his body-linen and little tie were of spotless whiteness, and he somewhat ostentatiously displayed a clerical felt hat. The bilious pallor of yesterday had all gone, and though still overcast, his fresh-coloured face was smooth and shining.

"You had a trying day yesterday," I remarked, after I had told him of what Peacock had been doing. "You look all the better for your night's rest."

"I didn't tell you of where I'd been before I came here," he answered. "I was very anxious to see Mr. Orme; so I went on to the Temple after I left Messrs. Higgenson and Flint."

"Mr. Orme!" I repeated, wondering what my client could have wanted with him.

"I didn't tell you yesterday. I felt a little shy; but I think you ought to know everything. The truth is, what upset me at home as much as anything, was finding that the man there, claimed the books in my study. He said they were all scheduled to the bill of sale."

"Is there anything particularly valuable?"

"There are a good many volumes of my sermons," he answered, in all simplicity; "I have them bound every half-year. But it wasn't them I was thinking of so much. It was the manuscript

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of the second series of my 'Old Testament Heroes.' When the man told me that that was included, I was very much upset, especially as he wasn't sure that he would be justified in letting me copy it before everything was taken away to be sold. It did seem so hard."

"But you were saying that you went to Mr. Orme."

"Yes, I wanted to see him, because a long time ago, I lent him a copy I'd had made, and he hadn't returned it."

"And did you get it?"

"No; he's lost it." The bereaved author said this with tears in his voice.

"I had to wait a long time for him. The house-keeper said she didn't know when he'd be back, and as she didn't ask me in, I had to wait on the stairs till he came. It *was* a long wait."

"And I don't think he was very glad to see me," continued the poor little man. "He was pleasant enough at first, but he wasn't the same. And I couldn't make him understand how important it was that he should find the copy. I explained why I wanted it so, and then he got quite irritable. I didn't at all like some of the language he used. It surprised me very much. He promised, at last, he'd look for it and send it to me, but I don't believe he will. To tell the truth, I couldn't help thinking he only said it to get rid of me." There was real pathos

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in my client's manner when he faltered out this suspicion.

"I'll see what I can do with Mr. Orme, if there really is any bother about your own manuscript," said I. "Perhaps he'll pay more attention to a solicitor. It was very wrong of him to be so off-hand; but, of course, he didn't fully understand how much you'd had to upset you yesterday."

"I don't know what I should have done, if you hadn't been so kind. And I found another friend at the First Avenue—that American gentleman you introduced to me: Mr. Fairfield. He happened to be staying there."

This was interesting. I wondered whether my friend had thought it worth while to deal faithfully with the reverend gentleman.

"He recognized me, and came up to ask if I wasn't well'; I suppose I did look a little poorly. And he was so kind that I told him what had happened. We had a long talk while he smoked. I was so pleased to see that he only drank soda-water. I never met any one like him; it was quite stimulating to hear him talk of the persecutions we Nonconformists endured in the early days."

"I'm glad you came across him," said I, marvelling greatly.

"He was very outspoken; but I didn't mind that. He actually told me that all the bother I was having was nothing to complain about, if we Passive

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Resisters meant what we said. Even when I told him that a good deal of my furniture had been bought when my wife and I set up house-keeping, and that it had a special value in my eyes on that account, he stuck to his opinion. But when I told him about my book he was much more sympathetic. He really got quite excited. He *was* different from Mr. Orme. Later on, we had a regular argument on Passive Resistance. He doesn't sympathize with it at all, though he admits that, so long as it really is passive, there's something to be said for it. But if, instead of letting our goods be taken, and stopping at that, we make a noise about it, and yet take care all the while, that the goods are only bought up to be given back to us, so that we suffer nothing at all, he declares it's a fraud and a sham. He put this so politely that you couldn't take offence."

"Did you discuss the ethics of going to prison, too?"

"No, he said he'd rather not say what he thought about that. Of course I knew what he meant. But he did say that he didn't believe any one in a free country could use the forms of the law, to defeat the law, without soiling his fingers. He said there were always plenty of pettifogging lawyers to egg people on to do shabby things, when once that game was on foot, and they were dangerous guides for honest men. There is something in that; isn't there?"

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It was painful to be called upon to confirm such a gross aspersion upon a noble calling, and I made a mental note to upbraid Mr. Fairfield when I next saw him, but for the time being, I was content to let the slur pass unchallenged.

"We had a little walk later on," continued the minister, "and your friend showed me St. John's Gate and the place where Hicks' Hall formerly stood. I'm not sure I quite know what Hicks' Hall was, but I found it very interesting. He seemed to enjoy it so."

I was glad to hear of all this; for I was beginning to feel a genuine liking for my client, and I was pleased to know that a better acquaintance had removed Mr. Fairfield's first impression of him. The descendant of the Pilgrim Fathers is not one to argue with a man he despises, or to cast his topographical pearls before swine.

"He's an interesting companion," I observed.

"He is indeed. On our way back to the hotel he took me to Smithfield, and pointed out the spot where the martyrs were burned. That was very stimulating. It's wonderful what a memory he has."

For some time after this the little pastor meditated in silence.

"I want to tell you something," he said suddenly, "I've come to the conclusion that there aren't many of us, nowadays, who are fit to be martyrs; we aren't

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made of the right stuff. I suppose we can't help that; but then we oughtn't to talk as if we were eager for the stake."

"Or as if we'd already been there," I hinted.

The Rev. Saxon Dawes blushed crimson. "I mean to say a few words about this from the pulpit," he said. "I told your friend so last night, and he said he'd come and hear me."

"Well; this *is* a fair old beano!" said Carlyon, with one of his boisterous laughs, when he shook hands with me that afternoon.

"Then comes the reckoning, and they laugh no more," was my answer.

"Have you the audacity to suggest that your client means to fight?"

"Have you the audacity to suggest that any money passed when your bankrupt took that bill of sale?"

"Do you know our bankrupt?"

"Yes; I had him in my office when this very bill of sale was in contemplation—it's none of my drawing, though—and I've seen him since, and heard a good deal about him, too."

"Ah! as you know him, you'll be able to appreciate what I'm going to tell you. He's ready to take his oath that the money did pass."

I was wholly unprepared for this fresh instance of Brother Nangle's villainy; but I knew my opponent

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too well to doubt his veracity. My feelings found vent in a whistle of astonishment.

"That man's a perfect devil," I ejaculated.

Carlyon had his laugh out before he answered. "The truth is, Harris, the trustee, found that bill of sale among Nangle's papers, but we hardly knew what to make of it. It looked like a mere sham—a dirty trick for advertising the Passive Resistance swindle. I'm not fond of Dissenters; especially ministers, and I was half-inclined to seize the furniture and chance it. I thought it was ten to one that a snivelling Passive Resister wouldn't like to have the whole thing ripped up before the Court; and I did long to have a go at him. The whole boiling of 'em ought to be whipped at the cart's tail. But you mustn't let your feelings carry you away in business, and as Nangle had disappeared, I thought I'd better hold my hand. Then Providence came in to help us. Nangle was arrested. We were able to get at him then. It's a mighty convenient thing to have a bankrupt in chokee—you can always get hold of him. It's where all bankrupts ought to be, for that matter."

"Most of them, anyhow," said I, "but this one ought to be broken on the wheel."

"Well, I sent Harris down to him to make inquiries about this bill of sale; and the poor captive said that, though he, himself, had never meant to enforce it against your client, he must, in justice to

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his creditors, admit that he had paid Dawes two hundred pounds."

"But, why on earth did the man go out of his way to lie like that?"

My opponent winked his eye. "I don't know what Harris said to him, and of course I'm bound to accept Harris's story; but I did fancy that Nangle was a little anxious to obtain legal assistance, and he may have thought that Harris could give him a leg up."

"It's a vile, dirty business for you to mix yourself up with," I said reproachfully.

"We musn't be unjust to poor Nangle. It's only fair to tell you that, just before his smash, he made several attempts to raise money on that bill of sale. That looks as if he thought it was a genuine document—doesn't it?"

Carlyon said this as if he were making a handsome admission in Nangle's favour, and then burst into another great laugh.

"And wouldn't any one take the security?" I asked.

"They wouldn't look at it when they found that the other party was a Dissenting minister. They knew the thing was no good."

"Yes, and you know it too. Come, come, Carlyon! isn't this a little too bad?"

"If Dissenting ministers play at bowls with the law, they must look out for rubbers," was his retort.

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"I don't often have to put a man in possession. That sort of thing isn't in my line. It's a nasty business to break up a man's home; but I was only too delighted to give your client a shake-up. I've heard all about him—little beast!"

"If you knew him, you'd be sorry for him. You've nearly broken his heart. And, by-the-by, do you know the man you've put in? I've heard some odd things about him."

"So he's been up to some of his larks; has he?" said Carlyon, rubbing his hands.

"You do know him, then?"

"I know him right enough. He came here as a boy five-and-twenty years ago. He worked his way up a bit, and then he left us to go to an auctioneer. He's an entertainer too—sings comic songs at the music halls, and does conjuring tricks. I'm afraid he's not much good at anything else, but he's devilish good at that. He always comes down to our children's parties. I thought he'd have a game with your client. He'll have a good yarn out of this."

"I say!" he went on, as if struck by a sudden thought, "are you busy this afternoon?"

"Not at all."

"Then you shall see him for yourself. Why shouldn't we have a joke in the Vacation? He came just before you did, so I said he must wait. We'll have him up. You won't tell tales out of school.—*Send Eagles up!*" he bellowed down a speaking-tube.

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Mr. Eagles proved to be a little man, with a diffident manner and twinkling black eyes.

"Taking an afternoon off, Tommy?" was Carlyon's greeting to his former clerk.

"I've left a relief in charge, sir. I had to come to town, and I thought you might like to see me."

"Getting on all right at Temsley?"

Eagles hesitated, and looked at me and then at his patron.

"It's all right, Tommy; go ahead!" said Carlyon, with a nod.

The man recognized this as an invitation to entertain us, and he responded, nothing loth.

He began his narrative with a shyness that was purely histrionic, but before the account of his reception at my client's house had fairly opened, he had thrown off all pretence of diffidence and the story had become a drama. The housekeeper—"a bit of a geyser, sir"—had opened the door to him; and by the time she had ascertained his business, and in the first flush of indignation had called in a policeman to eject "the low man," she stood before us in the person of Mr. Eagles, a veritable creature of flesh and blood. Even the policeman was a living reality. This pillar of the law made his exit, after pronouncing a considered opinion that the case was one for the County Court.

I kept my merriment within bounds; but Carlyon, who is a big, stout man, well over sixty, behaved

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himself like a child at the pantomime. I could see that he looked upon Mr. Eagles as his private jester, and took no little pride in his retainer's accomplishments.

"There seemed just a chance he'd come home early in the morning," said the man, a little later in his entertainment; "so I thought I'd sleep in his bed to be ready for him, in case he did. And the wheeze came off to rights! I was woke up by a noise on the stairs; and the next moment the door bursts open, and he nearly falls in with his portmanteau on his shoulder! When he catches sight of me in his bed——"

There was no need to describe how my poor client looked at that trying moment; for he stood before us, bent double under an imaginary load, and fairly petrified with astonishment and alarm.

"I know how to talk to a Dissenting minister—I was brought up among 'em—and I didn't forget he was a Passive Resister," explained Mr. Eagles, with a confidential wink, as soon as he had become himself again, and had opened fire upon the reverend gentleman.

"What's he like?" asked Carlyon, mopping his eyes and shaking all over.

"He's a sandy little gentleman, sir, with goggly eyes. And—oh, I forgot that!—he was in an awful state; I don't believe he'd had a wink of sleep, and I'm sure he'd been sick. I know that passage. I've

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done many a turn in Antwerp, at the Peter Paul. And he wasn't dressed like a minister, except for his tie, and I think he'd been laying with that and his collar pressed up against something smoky and a bit greasy. I never saw such a figure."

I will not give particulars of the conversation in which Eagles explained his presence in the other's bedroom, and deplored the hardness of a calling, which forced such a painful duty upon a man of his delicate sensibilities ; nor will I repeat the dialogue which ended in the capture of the portmanteau. "When I saw what he looked like, sir, it seemed a sin to let him change his clothes," was the jester's apology for this outrage.

But there was no resisting the low humour of the performance ; and when, to illustrate how he had carried his point, Eagles dropped down upon a deed-box, and with an expression upon his face, which defies description, made play to conceal his shanks by manipulating a nightshirt much too short for the purpose, I laughed and laughed again, and Carlyon's bellowings must have been audible half a mile away.

"I think you might have let him change his clothes, when you'd had your joke," I protested, with as much gravity as I could summon up.

"Well, I was a bit sorry, sir, myself, when he'd left the house. I told him, you know, that he ought to look upon me as a sort of guest—the stranger within his gates—and he said, oh yes; he quite

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understood that. And a few minutes after he'd gone downstairs, he came flying back to say that he hoped I got my meals comfortably. He didn't come in—out of delicacy. He opened the door just about an inch or so. And when I thanked him, and said something pretty about Elijah and the ravens, he said he'd asked his housekeeper to look after me. The next minute I heard the street door bang behind him."

"He hoped you got your meals comfortably!" chuckled Carlyon, who, just then, was drinking tea and eating sweet biscuits by great handfuls. "What had he to do with your meals? Ho-ho-ho!"

But though his laugh was contemptuous, I could see that the little pastor's apostolic conduct had made an impression on him.

"Surely you might leave the poor man in possession of his goods until I've decided what to do. You've had a good deal of fun out of him," said I.

"Will you give your personal undertaking that nothing shall go out of the house in the mean time?"

"Certainly—wearing apparel always excepted. He must have the use of his wardrobe. You can't be entitled to all of it, whatever may be down in Higgenson and Flint's schedule."

"You can take your man out, Tommy," said the lord to his vassal. "Let him have a wire. What are the things worth? You've gone over them, I suppose—what will they sell for, I mean?"

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"A hundred pounds, sir, p'r'aps."

"Look here!" said Carlyon, when Eagles had departed, "if you care to settle this, I'll take sixty pounds and cry quits. I can get that sanctioned, right enough. I'll give you four days to consider. I wouldn't let your man off altogether, even if I could. He must pay up or fight. It's a downright black-guard business, this alienation of property to defeat the rate."

"There I'm with you. Do you know Higgenson and Flint?"

"Rather! They're fair stinkers. They know me, too—ho-ho-ho! I hoped they'd be coming here as your client's solicitors."

"I've been wondering whether I can get at them over these bills of sale. Peacock tells me they've been registering them wholesale. Do you think it's professional misconduct? What's the Law Society's view?"

Carlyon screwed up his mouth. "Thank God, I'm not on the Committee," said he.

"But you're on the Council. May I take it that you'll do what you can to make the Committee consider such a case, if I get it put forward?"

"Oh yes! Oh, certainly!" he answered, as he shook hands. "I'd do it even if they were friends of mine; it ought to be stopped, if only for the credit of the profession."

CHAPTER V

"No," said the Rev. Saxon, when the legal position had been explained to him, "if I've acknowledged the receipt of the money, I must put up with the consequences."

"But you didn't know when you signed the bill of sale that the acknowledgment was in it," I urged.

"Ought I to have signed it without knowing?"

"You certainly ought not."

"I hope I've satisfied you that I didn't know. I shouldn't like you to think I would knowingly subscribe to anything that wasn't true."

"I'm quite satisfied on the point; and if you'll allow me to say so, it would never occur to me to doubt your word about anything."

"You're very, very good to me," he said, beamingly, but a moment later he was wrapped in gloom.

"It's dreadful, dreadful!" he murmured. "I can't keep my thoughts off it. It seems too dreadful to be true!"

I knew that he was referring to Nangle's falsehood. He had been struck dumb on hearing of it; but even after the first shock of surprise had worn

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off, and he fully understood how basely he had been treated, he did not utter a word of complaint. He seemed to give no thought to the wrong inflicted upon himself. "Oh dear! oh dear! I hope I shall never have to see him again," burst from him several times; but this only meant that a meeting with one whom he had loved and honoured, and who had proved to be so unworthy, would be more than he could bear.

"It seems too dreadful to be true," he said again.

"Have you quite made up your mind not to contest the trustee's claim?" I asked.

"Oh, quite; but how I am to scrape together the sixty pounds, I don't quite know."

"If the worst comes to the worst, you can give another bill of sale. I'll think the matter over. You keep your mind off it until you hear from me. I'll let Mr. Carlyon know that we accept his offer, and I'm sure he'll make things easy for us as regards payment. He won't expect the money within four days. You go home, and try to forget all about it for the present."

On my return from Carlyon's office, I had found the reverend gentleman waiting for me at Gray's Inn. He was so amazed to hear that I had been able to arrange for the immediate withdrawal of the man in possession, that he was disposed to regard me as a sort of legal magician; and when, in answer to

A Passive Resister

his questions, I had to explain that by giving the undertaking, I had bound myself to make good any injury, that a breach of it might occasion to the other party, he was so touched at what he considered an extraordinary proof of my confidence in him, that I saw the tears come into his eyes.

"I shall be glad to have my house to myself again," he said gleefully, as he bade me good-bye. He seemed to have forgotten that the good people of Temsley were inclined to treat him as a partner in Brother Nangle's iniquities.

Next morning, I presented myself at the office of Messrs. Higgenson and Flint, in Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, and craved audience of the senior partner. The office boy's room was a gloomy little crib, that looked out upon the patch of ground which was once the garden of Sir Edward Coke. Above the mantelpiece, "*Thou God seest me,*" frowned down in huge letters from an illuminated scroll. "If Carlyon saw that, he'd swear it was put up to keep the child from stealing the postage stamps," thought I.

Mr. Higgenson was a suave personage, with a beard just turning grey, and a shaved upper lip. Though I had merely sent in my name, I could see that he knew on whose behalf I was there. The man's manner was oily, but there was something in it which showed that he was on the defensive.

"You know what has happened to Dr. Dawes?" was my opening.

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"Most distressing, most distressing! The only instance of the kind within my experience."

"He instructs me that when he saw you, the day before yesterday, all you could tell him was that it was a painful case of misplaced confidence, and that unless he had the money to satisfy this bill of sale, he must send round the hat for it. Is that correct?"

"Do you suggest that I could have said anything else?"

Brother Higgenson was beginning to ruffle up his feathers, and he answered me with some asperity.

"I don't think this will do at all," said I.

He stared at me, but said nothing.

"I understand you have funds behind you," I went on. "I think it will be a bad thing for you and your partner, if you haven't."

"I think your client is very ill-advised to send you here to make threats," he snapped out, contemptuously.

"He doesn't know that I'm seeing you. I'm acting on my own responsibility. Do you suggest that this bill of sale was anything but a sham?"

"I suggest nothing."

"I'm told that you have been registering these things by the score, and that nearly all the grantors are Dissenting ministers."

"And what then?" he asked, still very contemptuous.

A Passive Resister

"Isn't this sort of thing conspiracy at common law? You must have seen what Lord Lindley said about the legal aspect of the movement."

Mr. Higgenson laughed and turned up his nose. "That doesn't frighten me," he said. "It's all bosh for one thing; and I don't quite see how you could put your own client into the dock."

"It had not occurred to me to attempt such a thing."

"Then what can you do?"

"Presumably, I can lay the matter before the Law Society as professional misconduct."

Having fired this shot, I lay back in my chair and gazed at the portrait of a comfortable-looking divine, which hung over the fireplace: it was the Rev. Thomas Binney.

"Bosh!" said Mr. Higgenson, but I noticed a slight change in his tone.

"By-the-by, do you know Mr. Carlyon—Priestleys and Carlyon?"

Any impression, which I had made by my threat of the Law Society, vanished at the mention of Carlyon's name. It acted like a red rag upon a bull.

"I know him — a foul-tongued, overbearing, vulgar——"

"Whatever he is, he's a member of the Council," I shot in.

This was news to the wholesale dealer in bills of sale, and his face showed that he did not relish it.

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"He acts for Harris, the trustee in Nangle's bankruptcy," I continued. "He knows all about this business. I was with him yesterday afternoon, and he promised to give me his support if I went to the Society."

"I spoke hastily just now," said my antagonist, in some disorder; "but whatever I may think of Mr. Carlyon, I should be sorry to believe that he would use his official position to gratify his private feelings." Brother Higgenson was evidently coming round. He spoke much more in sorrow than in anger.

"I'm sure he would do nothing of the kind, but I know he has a very strong feeling against the whole movement," said I. "You can judge as well as I can, whether the Discipline Committee are likely to share it."

"I can quite believe he wouldn't leave a stone unturned to prejudice them."

"Do you think they'd want any prejudicing?"

This question of mine was followed by an interval of silence. Mr. Higgenson sat studying his blotting-pad, while I feasted my eyes upon the placid effigy of the Rev. Thomas Binney.

"Perhaps you would like to consult Mr. Flint," I suggested.

"My partner is unfortunately out of town."

"Sixty pounds will square this business. I arranged that with Mr. Carlyon yesterday afternoon."

A Passive Resister

"Sixty pounds!" repeated Mr. Higgenson. The comparative smallness of the amount seemed to comfort him.

I've been thinking," he observed, after another silence, "that perhaps we ought to treat Dr. Dawes as one of our wounded soldiers—that his sufferings in the cause deserve some special treatment. And if sixty pounds——"

"When will the money be forthcoming?" I asked briskly.

"I can get a cheque to-morrow, if my view is shared by our committee."

"Then no doubt I shall hear from you before five o'clock. Good morning!"

The office boy was reading when I emerged from the passage into his dark den with its minatory text. I took him by surprise, and he huddled the object of his study into his pocket. But not before I had caught a glimpse of the title. It was, "Sweeny Todd ; or, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street."

I did not propose to communicate with my client until after I had heard the decision of Brother Higgenson's committee, whatever that body might be; but on my way up the Gray's Inn staircase, I heard a bounding step behind me, and the next moment the reverend gentleman was wringing my hand with a fervour that astonished me. One had only to look at his face, to see that he was brimming over with happy excitement.

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"I was quite wrong about my people," he began, without waiting until we had got into my room. "I don't think I ever knew them so kind and sympathetic. I hadn't been at home ten minutes before they began to drop in, or send messages, to say how sorry they were for me. And it did one's heart good to see how they rejoiced to hear that the man in possession had gone away. And—would you believe it?—I've been able to borrow the sixty pounds. That is such a weight off my mind."

"I hoped to be able to write to you to-morrow that I'd extorted the money——"

"Oh, but I've got a cheque in my pocket," he burst in; "a benevolent lady, who is a member of my flock, insisted on my taking it."

There was a trace of self-consciousness in his manner when he mentioned the lady, which set my mind working, and I remembered that he was a widower. But his next remark seemed to negative the existence of any relations of a tender character.

"She's an elderly widow lady. She won't hear of my giving any security. I don't think I need press the point; she's very wealthy, and even if I don't live to pay her back, there's my life policy as well as the furniture, to fall back upon. Do you think I need press it?"

"Oh no! But let me tell you what I've been doing this morning."

A Passive Resister

He heard me out; and then, after a few moments' reflection, he shook his head.

"I'd rather not take it," he said, with a rising colour. "I won't give my reasons, though I dare say you can guess them. No, I won't take it."

I felt that these reasons did him honour; and though he added, "I'm not sure either, that Mrs. Freemantle would quite like it, if I told her I needn't borrow the money," I thought none the worse of him for that touch of human nature. The primary motive was a lofty one, and who but a Pharisee dare cast a stone at him.

"I think I understand," said I.

"It's no such great sacrifice, after all," he continued. "I can easily pay it back in a couple of years. It only means postponing the publication of the second series of my 'Heroes,' you know. That's of no real consequence. Of course, I may be cut off in the mean time, but I can put a note with my will asking my executors to publish it. If a book's worth anything, it doesn't matter much when it comes out."

He sat meditating after this, and I wondered whether, in his mind's eye, he saw the "Heroes," standing side by side with the "Pilgrim's Progress," upon the bookshelves of pious generations yet unborn.

"It's very kind of your benevolent lady," I remarked.

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"It is, indeed; and to tell you the truth, I always had an impression that she didn't like me. She's been a member of my congregation for three or four years; but I always fancied she was a little chilly—till yesterday evening."

"Was the man out when you got home yesterday?"

"He was just going; it wasn't the one I found in my bedroom. I felt a little sorry that I didn't have a chance of bidding him good-bye. He was so considerate, you know."

"I remember your saying so on Tuesday."

"He was most considerate. And not only to me; he quite won my housekeeper's heart. There was some little unpleasantness, I understand, when he first came; but he bore no malice, and she seems to have quite enjoyed his company. Would you believe it?—he sings and plays the piano. It must be very painful for a man like that to have to follow such a harsh calling. It quite troubles me to think about it."

I dined with Mr. Fairfield that evening, and we made merry over the occurrences of the past few days.

"Don't go back to Chicago without giving me a report of the expiatory sermon," I said, at parting.

On the following Monday, my friend turned up at Gray's Inn. He knows that when business is slack

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he will always find a welcome and a cup of tea at about four o'clock.

"I doubt if that sixty pounds will ever be paid back," he observed, with a twinkling eye. "I was at Temsley yesterday."

"But he said that Mrs. Freemantle was an elderly widow."

"Did he mention her daughter?"

"Not he—the little villain! Have you seen her?"

"I sat in their pew—Dawes presented me to them outside—and they took us home to lunch. The old lady was mistaken in assuming that I took such an interest in missions to our Red Indians; but she was most kind and hospitable. I don't think I ever felt more inclined for an armchair and a good book than I did after lunch yesterday."

"But you did not have a nap?"

"That wouldn't have been seemly. But really I felt that I must have a stroll. There I was, 'replete with animal food,' as Dr. Marigold puts it. So I had another look at that old house. By-the-by, a native told me there was a local tradition that Oliver's body was buried in the garden, after it had been exhumed and hanged."

"But what about the martyrs?"

"Well, they took something of a back seat; the sermon was on brotherly love. He didn't leave them out altogether, but they played second fiddle, to say

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the least of it. His little heart was full of something else ; a pint-pot won't hold more than a pint. To tell the truth, the whole sermon was something of an anti-climax—we'd had such thrills in the second prayer. I believe they call it 'the long prayer,'" added Mr. Fairfield, musingly ; "and if they don't, they ought to."

"The first surprise came quite early in the prayer," he resumed, after lighting a cigar. "He couldn't have been on his knees for more than ten or twelve minutes when he sprang that upon us."

"Come, come!" I protested, laughing.

"Well, it seemed a very long time. I was just beginning to lose all sense of what was going on, when I felt a sort of shiver run through the congregation—I can't exactly describe what I mean—and I found that he was praying for Brother Nangle."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "He'll be hauled up for perverting the course of justice. The man isn't tried yet."

"I don't think you need be uneasy. Your law can't be quite such an ass as all that. I don't know how he led up to it—I'm sure the name wasn't mentioned—but when the shiver came, I found he was asking that our hearts might be cleansed of all bitterness and resentment, and that as we hoped to be forgiven our trespasses, so might we forgive those who had trespassed against us. Then he made a pause. And it was just as well he did ; the little

A Passive Resister

chap was very near breaking down. It really was quite touching—not a bit theatrical."

"And what was the second sensation?"

"That was when he returned thanks for the loan." My friend brought this out with much dry relish.

"Did he mention the name, that time?"

"No; but everybody understood. I don't say that any one looked up, but there was a general heave in our direction. I felt quite embarrassed."

"And how about Mrs. Freemantle?"

"Hum! I don't think it took her by surprise. And she's a rather self-important old lady, I may tell you. Unless I grievously misjudge her, she accepted it as a very proper acknowledgment of a meritorious action."

"And the young lady?"

"The young lady is quite different. I'd seen her before, by-the-by. She was sitting in our row at that meeting. Do you remember somebody laughing when Dawes thrust those provisions into my hands? That was she."

"I remember it quite distinctly. I'm glad she's got a sense of humour. I suppose, you're quite sure there is something on foot?"

"I may be parcel blind, or even sand blind," retorted Mr. Fairfield, caressing his *pince-nez*, "but I am not high-gravel blind; and as a matter of fact, the old lady said something as I squired her home

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on my arm. There's no formal betrothal yet. I suppose that will be announced from the pulpit in due course."

The betrothal was announced to me before many days had gone by ; and a few months later, I received a piece of wedding-cake. It has not yet been my privilege to meet the lady, nor have I seen her lord since he brought Mamma's cheque to Gray's Inn ; but by dedicating to me the second series of his great work, he has given an assurance of his regard, which will no doubt, transmit my name to a remote posterity.

By some means or other, the ex-church-officer managed to obtain legal assistance. More than once before the trial, I came across a newspaper paragraph informing the public, that Messrs. Higgenson and Flint had undertaken his defence ; and after his conviction, the firm found it necessary to write to the papers correcting certain errors in the reports. Sweet are the uses of advertisement, even in the by-ways of the Law ! Strange to say, the leading counsel for the prisoner was not Mr. Bellamy Orme.

Brother Nangle is at present an inmate of Wormwood Scrubbs prison. Carlyon assures me that when last heard of, he had joined the Established Church, and was in high favour with the chaplain who had effected his conversion.

A CASE OF WATER RIGHTS

CHAPTER I

IT was in the august neighbourhood, which borders Hyde Park on the east, that I made the acquaintance of the Hon. John Ellers, the defendant in the action of *Oldroyd v. Ellers*. This exalted person was no client of mine. His solicitors were Messrs. Empson and Dudley, the old country firm with whom, in my young days, I had served a clerkship. When I left them and settled in Gray's Inn, they transferred their London agency to me, and glad I was to have it at that time.

My business with the Hon. John was to take his instructions upon a certain opinion of counsel, and discuss it with him so far as might be necessary. Only the day before, had I been asked to do this. My country clients' letter had been accompanied by a formidable bundle of papers; and with apologies for the shortness of the notice, they had asked me to attend to the matter myself, and to do my best to pick up the facts in time.

On untying the bundle, I found that a Chancery

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action had been brought by one Luke Oldroyd against the Hon. John Francis Ellers-Talboys Ellers, to restrain him from diversion and pollution in respect of the waters of a stream called the Drawl brook, and a channel or goit called Longman's Gut, and that counsel had been instructed to advise whether the defendant had a good defence. I had no time to go into the matter just then; so picking out two or three of the more material documents, I summoned Mr. Thomas Murchison, my articled clerk, and requested him to make a digest of them. I did this, be it understood, more in his interest than in my own. It was unlikely that his milk teeth would prove equal to the task of cracking a nut so tough, and extracting its kernel; but I hoped that his efforts to do so would help to strengthen his jaws, and prepare them for similar exercises in days to come.

Tommy, however, did better than I expected. When, after dinner, I settled down to the matter, I found that his digest was a very creditable performance; though, notwithstanding the assistance which it gave me, I had to spend two or three hours over the papers before I felt properly equipped for the interview. I finished up by consulting a peerage, and reading, to my edification, the account which it gave of the defendant's family and its achievements.

When, at ten o'clock next morning, I presented myself in Park Lane, a grey-headed servant led me upstairs to a room overlooking the park. On a

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newspaper upon the floor lay a great heap of hothouse roses, and beside it was a girl just blooming into womanhood—a girl, who seemed like a flower herself.

"Mr. Ellers said he should be here," murmured the servant, as he turned to leave the room.

"My father hasn't come up yet; I think he's reading the paper."

It was a soft, sunny May morning; and she looked like the queen of roses, as she stood, the blossoms in both her hands and the sunbeams glistening on her hair.

I was seated near the window by this time, and for a minute or two I looked out upon the prospect. I knew from a rustling near the door that the girl was still busy with the flowers. Suddenly she spoke to me.

"You want to see my father about Mr. Oldroyd's complaints?"

"Yes," I answered.

She seemed a little embarrassed at having broken the ice, and her fingers were playing nervously with the stalks of a feathery bunch of green sprays.

"You're a lawyer; are you not?"

"I'm a solicitor," I admitted.

"Isn't it a pity, this trouble about the Drawl?" she asked timidly.

I was disposed to think that it was a great pity; but my opinion was a crude one, and good or bad, it was no part of my duty to lay it before her. This being so, I took refuge in a platitude.

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"A dispute between neighbours is always a pity."

"Can't you advise my father——" she began; but at this moment the door opened and she broke off.

My personal acquaintance with noble lords and their relations had been so slight that I was conscious of a feeling of surprise, not to say disappointment, when the Hon. John stood before me. He had a thin and weedy yellow beard, and there was a plumpness about his figure and a dreamy look in his spectacled eyes, which were more suggestive of a German professor than a landed proprietor, who was own brother to a viscount. He was well-groomed, however, and his manner was cordial and easy.

"So sorry to bring you out so early," he began, after shaking hands, "but I dare say my solicitors told you I was leaving town in a hurry; I'm due at Charing Cross in an hour. I've read Mr. Siderfin's opinion," he went on, as he took a chair and began to turn over some papers. "It's quite clear; isn't it?"

"Quite clear, I think."

"And I've got a good case?"

"That's Mr. Siderfin's opinion."

"And he says I ought to fight."

This was overstating the effect of the opinion. "He advises you to fight, if you attach importance to the rights you claim, either from the benefit you derive from them personally, or for the sake of protecting the inheritance," I remarked.

"Oh yes! those are his words, I remember. I

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was struck at his reference to the inheritance. That really means those who come after me ; doesn't it ! ”

As he said this he looked towards the girl. She was still busy with the flowers, and apparently was not listening. The peerage had told me that he was a widower and that she was his only child.

“ Now I come to think of it,” he resumed, “ it was that suggestion which turned the scale in my own mind. I mustn't sacrifice the inheritance.”

“ Then you have made up your mind ? ”

“ Yes ; I was doubtful until that point about the inheritance came before me ; but, as I said just now, that turned the scale. And then, again, this Yorkshireman's not to be trusted. Give him an inch and he'd take an ell. Yes, I'm quite determined to fight.”

From Mr. Ellers' manner, and, in particular, from the satisfaction with which he referred to the inheritance, one felt a suspicion that he had welcomed that point, not to say jumped at it, as an excuse for taking a course which his better judgment condemned ; and when he came to speak of his opponent, my suspicion hardened into something like a certainty. The Yorkshireman was evidently such a very objectionable person that to yield to him, even if he were in the right, would be sorely against the grain.

“ Your wish is that Mr. Oldroyd's solicitor shall have notice that the action must proceed,” said I.

“ Yes, that's my wish. I dare say you know this

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is the last day. By-the-by, I thought the offer he made when he sent the writ, to give us a month in which to reconsider matters, looked encouraging. A man wouldn't do that if he thought he was sure to win."

I did not feel certain of this, for it struck me that, possibly, the plaintiff might feel so sure of his case as to be indifferent to any construction which the other side might put upon his offer. And I had another consideration in my mind. Knowing something of the awful expense of such litigation as that threatened, I thought that a practical man, who knew what he wanted and meant to fight for it, if he could not get it by other means, might very well give his opponent a last chance of coming to terms with him out of court.

"Don't you agree with me?" asked Ellers.

"One must know a good deal more of the people we have to deal with than I know, to feel sure of what that offer means, but I confess I don't feel certain that it shows weakness," said I; and I went on to give my reasons.

"I'm sure, father, that Mr. Oldroyd means to go on," broke in the girl, as soon as I had come to an end. "All the people at Monksmill were talking about it when I left Constable yesterday. Crimp, the blacksmith, told Hammond that if Mr. Oldroyd didn't get his rights, he meant to sell all and go back to Yorkshire for good, though he *had* bought Pett's farm

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and Longman's meadows. He said you might guess he wouldn't do that without a struggle."

"He's spent twenty thousand pounds at Monks-mill; if he spends a little more on law, perhaps he'll get his own way with the water," said the Hon. John, a little heated, "but he won't get it by blustering. We'll see what becomes of his threat when the action's over. Let him go back to Yorkshire and welcome! Who wants him at Monksmill?"

"Uncle Kerswell will be home in about three weeks; can't you wait till then, and talk it over with him? I'm sure you'll be dreadfully worried if there's any law business."

Miss Ellers had come forward, and she was standing by her father as she said this.

"The expense will be so dreadful—you said we couldn't afford it—and it does make so much bad feeling between the two villages," she went on. "Hammond declared that Crimp was quite insulting. He said that Mr. Oldroyd had done more for Monks-mill in six years than we'd done for Constable since King Harry's time. It wasn't like Crimp to say that."

"I dare say the man encourages his people to make themselves offensive," retorted Ellers. "No, Doris, this must be settled at once. Mr. Oldroyd has brought his action and I won't ask for any delay. If he's ready to go on, so are we."

CHAPTER II

THE history of Constable Abbey may be read by all in the erudite pages of the county historian.

At the Reformation the abbey of St. Jerome was suppressed and the fabric dismantled. The lands and all the abbey's riparian rights and privileges, were granted to one Christopher Talboys, "a gentleman of Gloucestershire." In the reign of Elizabeth, the grandson of this Talboys built a mansion house, and round it he laid out a park, the southern boundary whereof was the Drawl. The demesne was known by the old name of Constable Abbey, and by that name the mansion house, and all about it, have been called to this day.

In Constable park, some half-mile lower down the stream, the third Talboys built a dower house. This, for a hundred and fifty years, was known as the Small House, and was an appanage of the Abbey, but early in the reign of Queen Anne the name was changed to Monksmill House. A few years before this, a good slice of the eastern portion of the park, including the site of the Small House, had been sold by the Talboys of that day; a utilitarian person who, when asked

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why he did not sell a farm instead, had made answer that dower houses paid no rent.

Opposite this house, on the other side of the Drawl, the abbey mill had stood with, perhaps, a few cottages round it, and the place had gained the name of Monksmill. For some reason or other, the old mill had been abandoned by the monks, and they had built a new mill at a point higher up the stream, hard by the village of Constable-Abbotts. This village was in existence as far back as the eleventh century, when Monksmill had not even a name; but, for three centuries past, Monksmill has been slowly lifting its head, and now it bids fair to outgrow Constable-Abbotts itself.

In one respect, however, it can never cope with the older village; for the Abbey park and woodlands are very fine, and the mansion house is one of the most beautiful homes in England. To general features, which will bear comparison with Wotton or Charlecote, it adds the crowning glory of a large gothic hall, once the abbey chapel. The ruins of this building were left untouched when the mansion was built—possibly Talboys, the third, had a sense of the picturesque, and thought them a good foil to his red brickwork—and so they remained until a successor of James the Second's time set about restoring them, and making such alterations in the house, as were necessary to work the two fabrics into one harmonious whole. Tradition says that he spent

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the equivalent of some thirty thousand pounds of our money before his end was accomplished.

The Hon. John Ellers became entitled to the Abbey estate under his mother's marriage settlement. She was a Miss Ellers-Talboys, who had married the then Lord Kerswell. The pair were distant cousins; for, about a hundred years before, a female Talboys, the owner of the estate, had married an Ellers, a nephew of the head of that family. The double-barrelled surname owed its existence to this union.

Monksmill House is simply a square, comfortable dwelling-house of four storeys, with a tiled roof and a bell-tower, but the grounds are extensive. The entrance is on the south side, nearly opposite a bridge over the Drawl. The highway to Monksmill village runs over this bridge, and then curves to the left, past the gates. In the other direction, the road follows the river in a bold sweep to the north-west; and, crossing another bridge, it enters Constable-Abbots, just below the present mill. Half-way through the village the park gates open upon a chestnut avenue, which leads up to the Abbey.

Oddly enough, the two properties were reunited in the fat years of the Peninsular War, nearly a hundred years after the severance, but in the lean years that followed Waterloo, the son of the Ellers-Talboys, who had bought back Monksmill House, found himself in want of money and had to sell it. This was a blow to the family dignity, which he felt sorely; and

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in his will, he followed the devise of the Abbey estate by a pious hope that the devisee, or some later Ellers-Talboys, might restore the demesne to its original proportions. No succeeding owner had been able to do this, though each one had cast an envious eye upon the house by the bridge, and had longed to recover it. The Hon. John looked upon it with none the less envy, because, from the very first, he had found it no easy matter to make both ends meet. To a rent-charge, created by the marriage settlement in favour of his two sisters, he had been obliged to add a mortgage on his own account, whereby the income of the property had been considerably reduced.

Oldroyd had bought Monksmill House five or six years before the issue of his writ. He was the son of a Yorkshire manufacturer, who had begun his career as a mill-hand. By thrift and intelligence the mill-hand had worked his way up, until at the age of sixty-five, he had handed over his two or three woollen mills to his son, and had retired to an estate, which he had bought in the Leeds district. To the last he retained many of the ways of his youth. I have been assured that when he went over the property, before making his offer for it, he partook of a meat tea with the caretaker, and that when he called on the vendor's solicitors to discuss terms, he strolled into their office in his shirt sleeves. Fortunately for Seth Oldroyd's son, the boy was not born until his sire was in comfortable circumstances, and

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it was equally fortunate that the father was keenly alive to the advantages of a good education.

Luke Oldroyd took warning by the example of his father, who had died of sheer lack of employment, two years after his retirement. Though Luke carried on the mills with all the zeal and ability of his predecessor, his superior education and broader outlook enabled him to delegate much of the work to subordinates, with the result that he found time to learn the business of a country gentleman while he was comparatively young. Before he was fifty he turned the wool-making concern into a limited company; and having reserved to himself a commanding position on the directorate, he confined his attendance at the mills to one day a week, or thereabouts, and spent the rest of his time upon the estate, which had so shortened his father's life. A few years later he came to the conclusion that he would give up business altogether. He had a large fortune; he found no difficulty in occupying his time apart from the mills, and he was advised that his wife must live in a warmer atmosphere than the keen Yorkshire air.

At this time Monksmill House was to let. Luke Oldroyd took it for a year, and furnished a sufficient part of it for his wife; he himself, rarely stopping there for many weeks at a time.

The feud with Ellers had its beginning at a very early date. The new tenant of Monksmill House was a fisherman; and though the fishing in the Drawl

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was beneath his notice, he was much incensed to find, one morning, that the water was fouled with some chemical matter. On crossing the bridge and following the pollution up stream, beyond the wall dividing the two properties, he was satisfied that it originated in a discharge from the park bank, just below a wooden structure, almost hidden in a clump of trees. He was able to ascertain from a road-mender that this was a laboratory, which Ellers, who dabbled in chemistry, had put up a few years earlier.

The stream was clear again very soon, but Oldroyd determined to keep an eye upon the water, and to communicate with his landlord in the event of the nuisance being repeated. His proposed course of action was irreproachable ; but, unluckily, he was still angry when he told one of his men to keep a watch, and he interlarded his instructions with some strong language, reflecting upon his neighbour's unneighbourliness. This (with, of course, considerable additions) reached Ellers through the channel of his bailiff, with the result that the Abbey folk held aloof from the new tenants of the House.

At the end of the first year, it seemed probable to Oldroyd that, before long, he would have to turn out in favour of a purchaser, if he merely renewed his tenancy. Under the circumstances, he decided to buy Monksmill House and make it his own home during the winter months. Even his loyalty to Yorkshire could not blind him to the fact that there

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was something very alluring in the milder winters of the South.

No sooner was the place his own, than the temptation to make improvements was too much for him. From improvements to additions was only one step ; and before four years had run out, he had made two purchases of land adjoining his property on the east. One of the purchases comprised certain fields called Longman's meadows, through which ran an arm of the Drawl : a channel or goit called Longman's Gut.

There had been a second pollution of the stream soon after the purchase of Monksmill House. On this occasion Oldroyd had written to Ellers, and had received a reply intimating, stiffly but politely, that the complaint should be investigated. But no further letter followed.

Next summer there was another exchange of letters. During a long spell of dry weather, the stream ran so low, that a supply of water, which had always been obtainable for stable use at Monksmill House, failed altogether. At the same time that Oldroyd was told of the failure of his pumps, it was hinted to him that some change had recently been made in the working of Constable mill, and that but for this, the supply in the main stream would not have sunk so low. In writing to Ellers, he appealed to him not to allow his tenant, the miller, to do anything that would unnecessarily reduce the flow of the Drawl. The answer was an unmistakable snub :

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whatever the miller might be doing, Ellers was sure that he was acting within his rights, and the matter was, therefore, not one for a landlord's interference.

So far, Oldroyd's communications had contained no threat of legal proceedings. They had been letters drawing the attention of the upper riparian owner to inconveniences inflicted upon the one below him, and asking for their abatement. In his cooler moments, Oldroyd admitted that the two instances of pollution had been of very trifling description, and that the failure of the water supply to the stables had not lasted for more than two or three days. These things had, in fact, been little more than trifles, but in the summer following the purchase of Longman's meadows, matters assumed a more serious aspect. The tenant of these meadows relied upon Longman's Gut for watering his horses and cattle; and he had assured Oldroyd, soon after the completion of the purchase, that with the exception of the two or three summer days on which the stable pumps at Monksmill House had failed, he had, during the whole term of his tenancy—a period of some twenty years—always had a supply sufficient for his wants.

This set his landlord a-thinking; and when next summer there was a prolonged drought, and for five weeks Longman's Gut had been nearly dry, he drove into Moatsbridge and laid the facts before Mr. Althelstan Sawyer. This gentleman was a solicitor of five-and-thirty, shrewd, industrious, and keen as

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mustard. He had descended upon the city like a squatter, five years before ; and in these five years, incredible though it may seem, he had managed to get himself talked about as a man against whom, when it came to fighting, the old established practitioners were as babies. That evening the first shot in the coming battle was fired.

Ellers carried Sawyer's letter to Empson and Dudley. They had recently acquired from the widow of his late solicitor, who had died suddenly, the right to call themselves the dead man's successors, and had circularized his clients accordingly. The mere fact that Oldroyd had instructed Sawyer, put them on their mettle ; and in their answer to his letter, they struck a note of hostility and contempt, which he was only too ready to adopt and accentuate.

While the war of correspondence was raging, each side was straining every nerve to obtain evidence in support of its contentions. Sawyer and his spies left no stone unturned, and Empson and Dudley were hardly less energetic. Everybody in the two villages knew what was on foot, and feeling began to run high between them. Monksmill to a man swore by Oldroyd, and Constable by Ellers. The Yorkshireman's money meant a good deal to the one, while in the other, the Squire, as Ellers was generally called, had a long feudal tradition behind him, and was, himself, not unpopular. And to fan the flame, there were the local jealousies, which had been smouldering

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for generations. Monksmill and Constable hailed the plaintiff and defendant as their champions.

The more Sawyer looked into the case, the more confident he grew, and the more irritating were the letters which he wrote to the other side. The old firm ought to have set him a good example, but under the flouts and jeers of their young rival, they flung dignity to the winds. I fairly blushed for my old masters when the huge block of futility came before me. It was everything that a correspondence between solicitors ought not to be. It was a mere scolding match ; and so lamentably ineffectual. Never before had I come across such a monument of bad temper, bad feeling, and bad English.

CHAPTER III

In mercy to the non-legal reader I must pass rapidly over the progress of the litigation down to the trial.

Lord Bowen is reported to have said that actions were lost or won before they went into court. Whether this be often the case nowadays, the present scribe has his doubts, but it cannot be denied that in litigation of importance, the course of proceedings before trial has a very material bearing upon the final issue, and offers scope for many tactical operations, vastly entertaining to the instructed. The only pity is that chess-playing of this kind is so costly.

The first move in *Oldroyd v. Ellers* was made a few days after my interview with the defendant. Oldroyd served notice of motion for an interim injunction: that is, an injunction until the trial of the action. This move was purely tactical, for in the circumstances of the case, an order was not to be hoped for. What the plaintiff wanted was to lure us into disclosing, by our affidavits in opposition, certain evidence, which would be useful to him for the purposes of his statement of claim—the pleading in

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which a plaintiff sets out his case for the consideration of the Court. This manœuvre, however, was unsuccessful ; for without filing any evidence we got the motion put aside.

In due course, the statement of claim was put in. This was a very long document, which carried matters back to the foundation of Constable Abbey in the third year of King John. This pleading having been followed by a light skirmish at our instance, which resulted in the plaintiff being forced to give certain further information on one or two points, our pleading in answer was put in. This provoked another light skirmish for particulars ; the attacking party being the plaintiff, and at the same time, both parties entered upon a severe conflict for the inspection of one another's documents. The next operation of any importance was their struggle for the inspection of one another's properties.

I may mention in passing, that science and art, in the persons of engineers and photographers, were shedding their beneficent influence upon the fray, and that humane letters joined them later on, when the abbey charters were produced, and translation became necessary. The claim to relief on the ground of pollution had not been carried further than the writ, or the aid of chemistry must also have been invoked.

In the affairs of outposts, to which I am now referring, the engineers were to the fore on both

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sides : the photographers had been in the field from the beginning. With these last I had no personal communication—they were instructed in the country—but I had a good deal to do with the engineers : skilled mercenaries of Victoria Street, who saw only with the employer's eye, and in whose hands mathematics were as gutta-percha.

But though I saw nothing of the photographers, I saw plenty of their handiwork. From that, I seemed to know the Drawl eastward from Constable Mill to where Longman's Gut rejoined it, and the whole course of the Gut itself, as intimately as if I had been born on the land. Some of these photographs—"laughing shallow and dreaming pool"—were enough to make a Londoner in the dog days, pant longingly for the waterbrooks and the green countryside.

Now and again, during the preliminary stages of the action, I heard from one source and another, of the difficulty that each party was experiencing in obtaining evidence, so far as his opponent's end of the *locus* was concerned. Every dweller at the Monksmill end was the sworn vassal of the plaintiff, and a perfect mine of information in his favour ; while at Constable, every man, woman and child was eager to assist Ellers, and correspondingly eager to injure Oldroyd. I was assured, moreover, that the readiness with which these simple-minded children of the soil had grasped the essential points in dispute,

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and the dexterity with which they framed their evidence in accordance with the requirements of their own side, was almost diabolical; and that, in these respects, there was not a pin to choose between Monksmill and Constable.

When first the plaintiff's engineers went a-gauging and spying about generally, in the neighbourhood of our mill, their demeanour to the natives was most ingratiating, and they plied them with artful questions. In the innocence of their hearts, these experts thought to obtain scraps of evidence in Oldroyd's favour, but after the first visit the experiment was not repeated. It was with roars of laughter that Jobson, one of our engineers, reported to me how a friend of his, retained on behalf of the enemy, had fared in his efforts to pick up evidence at Constable, and Jobson went on to admit that he, himself, had gone through a precisely similar experience at Monksmill.

Of the dealings of the one village with the other I heard something from old Trout, a veteran clerk of Empson and Dudley, who had been a colleague of mine in their office five-and-twenty years before.

"There's a regular patrol above the mill," said he, "and if any one from Monksmill, or any stranger, shows himself he can't cock an eye over the bank without being marked down. Our people can't keep 'em off the ground—the path's a public thoroughfare—but it's none too pleasant to be squinting about

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with half a dozen hanging round you, and one or two of 'em spitting on their hands."

"Do your people manage to keep an eye on the Gut?"

"Pretty fair! The bed of the brook's our land down there, and you can see the Gut from the north bank. Old Zachary Thrift's our best man for seeing what's going on; he's wonderful clever, though he's ninety."

"How does he manage it? Isn't all Monksmill on the lookout for spies?"

"The old chap turns out as soon as it's light; he says he don't care for sleeping much at a stretch. He was on the job at three o'clock all last summer."

"And how about the winter?"

"There's nothing to watch in the winter; there's plenty of water for everybody, then. And it isn't only at Monksmill our old man's been watching. He's been keeping an eye on the other end of the Gut too, where the intake is. Oldroyd's men take a lot of interest in that; but it ain't easy to get at. It's in our park, you see! Old Thrift was too much for one of 'em last June. Oh Lord, that was a good 'un!" and Trout stopped to roar over the recollection.

"It was like this," he resumed, after wiping his eyes. "Zachary had been down to the water meadows, taking a squint at the Gut, and, on his way back to Constable, he sits down to have a rest in the hedge."

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"Rather damp for a gentleman of ninety," said I.
"How about the dew?"

"Oh, he'd find a dry place. Trust him for taking care of himself! Well, the old chap falls asleep, and he's woke up by some one getting over the stile close by, where the footpath from Monks-mill comes out. Out pops Crimp, the blacksmith, and he crosses the road, and gets through the hedge on the other side. He didn't see Thrift; but Thrift saw him, and he knew he was going down to the brook. So he waits a little while, and then he creeps through the hedge. There's some alders and bushes on the brook side just there, and he thinks Crimp must be behind 'em, because he can't see him. So he creeps up steam a bit, and looks back; and then he sees there's a plank run right across out of the bushes—it's near the intake, you understand!—and there's Master Crimp on the park side, taking his observations! Presently he comes back along the plank, and he hides it in the bushes, and off he strolls, as pleased as Punch. Thrift goes and looks at the plank, and finds it a good stout one, and new—the brook's a fairish width just there, and Crimp's as heavy as an elephant. Thrift thinks matters over, and as soon as folks are about, he goes up to the Abbey and sees his grandson. Ben Thrift's a gardener there—that's what Zachary was, till Mr. Ellers pensioned him off—and he's clever at carpentering. Between 'em they doctor up that plank,

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so as it looks all right, but' won't stand much weight in the middle. Next morning, old Zachary goes out at daybreak, and he hides near the bushes, but Crimp doesn't come. And he doesn't come the next day; nor the next. Zach don't mind. His time's his own, he says, and he swears he'll stick to it for a month, if need be. The fourth day's Sunday; but he says to himself he won't run no risks, and down he goes. Presently, he hears Crimp getting through the hedge, and sees him come prancing down to the brook. He shoves the plank across, and the next minute it's broke in two, and he's head over heels in the Drawl. He lands out on the park side, swearing something fearful, for he's got his best trousers on. Thrift sees he hasn't the ghost of a notion that the thing isn't a pure accident. There he sits, till it strikes him that he came to see the Gut, and he thinks that, wet or dry, he may as well have a look at it before he goes back; so he gets up. But he catches sight of one half of the plank; and he fishes it out, and he takes a look at the broken end. Then he stares hard at it, and then he sits down again and studies it, and begins to whistle. At last, he drops it, and sits there scratching his head. When he's tired of that, he hunts about till he finds the other half; and he puts both halves under his arm, and he wades across, and goes off home, as meek as a mouse."

"That isn't the end of it, either," added Trout,

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when we had had our laugh. "Crimp thought nobody knew what had happened; but when he next showed himself in Constable, the children began to ask him questions about his Sunday trousers. No man dare do it, and the women wouldn't."

We were getting near Christmas, when old Trout looked in at Gray's Inn to have a chat with me. The affairs of outposts were yet in progress, and the decisive battle was still a long way off. As a matter of fact, it did not come on until the following June. A good deal of delay was necessarily occasioned by the enemy amending his statement of claim, after his lawyers had gone through Ellers' muniments of title, and his engineers had inspected the intake in the park; but the exceeding bitterness with which the action was fought on both sides, was responsible for much of the time occupied. The country solicitors, in their exasperation, were like two game-cocks; and though Sawyer's London agent and I, to say nothing of counsel, endeavoured to hold their ferocity in check, I must confess that a great deal of money was wasted.

Butterfield, Sawyer's agent, was a youngish man, lean and hungry of aspect, and by nature, almost as combative as Sawyer himself, but he had had a public school education, and he was keenly susceptible to the moral influence which the Court exercises over all its officers, and especially over those who come in direct contact with its machinery. In the case

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of London agents, who are bound to pass their whole lives before judges and their subordinates, this influence is almost irresistible. The Court loves fair dealing as between man and man; it loves the things that are honest, the things that are just, and it makes no concealment of its preferences. There are many acts, which we, who follow the law in either of its branches, may do without express censure, and doubtless things unlovely, and things of ill-repute are done by one and another of us; but he, who so demeans himself as to get a name for crookedness in any form, had better put on the whole armour of a rhinoceros before venturing into the open to do business with the Court. In a hundred ways, it will be brought home to him that he is on a different footing from his fellows: that they are trusted and he is not. A man must have a forehead of brass to bear this unshaken.

An old stager like myself, whose position is assured and whose circumstances are easy, is under no temptation to strain the practice, unless he have some unaccountable twist in his moral fibre. His interest is all the other way, for his standing before the Court is a valuable professional asset; but things are somewhat different with a young practitioner, who is fighting for a livelihood, and to whom the emoluments of the moment are likely to seem all-important. Butterfield, however, had intelligence enough to look ahead, and to see that, in the long run, it would pay him better

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"to stand well with the officials," as the phrase is, than to gratify Sawyer by slavishly following his instructions, no matter how outrageous they might be. His influence, therefore, was on the side of moderation; and I, for one, do not blame him for calling in the wisdom of the serpent, in order that he might hold his client in check, without imperilling his own bread and cheese.

"I'm to ask for leave to dig up some pipes in your conservatory," he remarked to me on one occasion.

"You won't get that; it's ridiculous!"

"I'm not going to try. What would the master think of it? No fear! I trotted off to Pickersgill's chambers and told him; then I wrote down that counsel thought it was premature. Only premature, you see—that was my tact. If I hear any more of it, I shall have to swear it will irritate the judge: that's my trump card, but one mustn't put it down too often."

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," said I.

I dare say Oldroyd was too shrewd a man of the world to suppose that Sawyer needed any stimulus from him; but, after matters had got beyond a certain point, the Hon. John was undoubtedly eager to spur on Empson and Dudley. The amendment of the statement of claim had alleged a newly discovered grievance, which it was not easy to rebut. Oldroyd's

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engineers had reported that the mechanical appliance, which raised water to the Abbey, was so constructed as to deprive the Gut of some portion of the supply, which it had received from time immemorial; and an investigation of the matter seemed to establish the fact that the cause, which had produced this result, was an alteration of comparatively recent date.

Ellers' legal right to reduce by these means, the flow of water passing down the Gut to Longman's meadows was open to doubt; but the point was a fine one, and counsel leaned to the view that the plaintiff had no remedy. In morals, however, our position was indefensible, for Jobson reported that at a trifling expense such an alteration could be made, as would give the Abbey a full supply without robbing the Gut of a single gallon.

To do the defendant justice, he saw this, and he was willing to put matters on a right footing, but his lawyers held him back. Empson and Dudley were strongly opposed to the concession being made, and counsel, after some hesitation, came round to the view that to make it might weaken our defence on other points, to say nothing of its having an awkward bearing upon the general question of costs.

I do not think that Ellers was sorry to have these excuses for not altering his machinery—he was too wroth with Oldroyd for that—and the fact that a weak spot in his defence had been found out by his opponent, made him only the more anxious to put

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himself in the best possible position for winning the action, nevertheless. Our engineers had reported that certain acts or defaults on Oldroyd's part—I forget what they were—had tended to slightly reduce the supply of water to Longman's meadows; and on this, some genius had pointed out that, as there must be a consequent reduction of the water passing out of the east end of the Gut back into the brook, Ellers, who owned property lower down, might carry the war into the enemy's country by making this the foundation of an attack upon the plaintiff.

Even Siderfin, whose reverence for the rights of property—the property of those instructing him, be it understood!—was almost superstitious, could not go to this length. He simply laughed when the point was mentioned to him; and when, later on, he was instructed to advise whether a counter-claim could not be launched, his opinion was some six lines in length, and was barely polite. Unfortunately, the defendant had caught eagerly at the suggestion that the war should be carried into the enemy's country. The phrase captivated him, and it was to satisfy his mind that Siderfin was consulted with all due formality. Good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable; but they are more valuable as servants than as masters.

So interested was the Hon. John in the proposed counter-claim, that he drove with his daughter to Gray's Inn to learn what Siderfin had advised.

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The two were staying again at Lord Kerswell's. Peacock showed them in with great dignity; and I have reason to believe that he spent a long time downstairs admiring the vehicle from the first-floor landing. Coroneted carriages are no great rareties under my windows; but it is not my clients who drive up in them.

Ellers read the opinion, and put it down without comment. There was really nothing to discuss. He looked so glum, and the silence was so uncomfortable that, in order to break the ice, I began to ask questions about some recent performances of our engineers.

This led to a general talk about the action. Suddenly there came a question, which more than once I had seen approaching, and which I had been trying to keep in the background.

“Do you think I shall win?”

“My opinion's hardly worth anything,” I began. “I don't pretend to be a lawyer; and the points of law are unusually difficult——”

“But you've had a great experience of litigation,” he interrupted.

I could not deny this.

“And my brother, who knows more about law business in London than I do, tells me that your position—your position as Mr. Empson's agent, I mean—enables you to take a more unprejudiced view than he can. Is that so?”

I had to let this, also, pass unchallenged.

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"And therefore, I want to know what you think. If there's any reason for your not giving an answer—I know there are rules in all professions, and I'm sure you won't suspect me of wanting you to break them," he interpolated, with a smile—"if there is any reason of that kind, you must tell me."

"I'll give you my opinion," said I. "And I can't put it better than in sporting language. I think the odds are in your favour."

"You don't think it's a certainty?"

"I do not."

"I suppose the expense will be considerable, even if I win?" he said gloomily.

"I'm afraid it will."

Though Trout had told me that Ellers was always inclined to be optimistic, his gloom on the present occasion was easy to account for. Siderfin's opinion had been such a blow that, for the moment, he was disposed to see everything through very dark glasses.

"But the expense if I win, will be nothing to what it will be if I lose," he said, reviving a little.

"If Mr. Oldroyd has to pay your costs, it will make a very great difference."

"My brother thinks it might be worth while to try to come to some agreement, even now," he observed, after a long pause. "I think I should, if the man were a gentleman. But it's out of the question. And there's that blackguard solicitor of his. Did you ever read anything like his letters?"

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Ellers asked this wrathfully; but I thought of the other side of that correspondence, and I held my peace.

"Disgraceful letters!" he exclaimed, in the next breath, still more wrathfully.

"But Uncle Kerswell says you might approach Mr. Oldroyd through somebody else—Sir John Trent, for instance," put in his daughter.

"No, no, no, no, no!" he said peevishly; "that would never do. I couldn't ask Trent to approach such a fellow. And I'm sure I'm right about the mill, at all events. I can't give way there. I must remember the inheritance."

"I wish, father, you'd think about your own peace of mind and not about that," was her answer. "And if we do lose, won't that be still worse for the poor inheritance?" she went on, with a smile that was only half playful.

"You may have heard that he's building a village hall at Monksmill," said her father, ignoring this and turning to me.

I had heard of it, and I had wondered how his adversary liked it. Butterfield had once hinted that if Oldroyd had not been buying land, when Ellers had to strain every nerve to keep what he had inherited, and particularly, if he had not rebuilt a row of labourers' cottages on the Longman's property, his neighbour would have been less inclined to quarrel with him about the water. Knowing that this must have come from Sawyer, I took it for what it was

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worth, but the innuendo came to my mind when I heard about the village hall.

"I hope Constable won't expect me to go and do likewise," he added ; and he said it so good-naturedly that I felt half ashamed of my suspicions.

"You know they won't expect it," said the girl, reproachfully.

"You think they'll say I can't afford it, when Monksmill twits them with it ? "

"I'm sure they will."

"That's one of the advantages of living in the country," said Ellers, laughing at my surprise ; "your neighbours know so much about your affairs."

"Has Mr. Oldroyd any political axe to grind ? " I asked.

"He may have for the boy."

"I didn't know he had a son."

"Oh yes ! By-the-by, Doris, it's a long time since we've seen him. We used to come across them pretty often, riding together ; they're a good-looking pair on horseback."

"I've never heard any harm of that boy," he remarked, thoughtfully, as he rose from his chair.

Possibly he was wishing that he had a son, with whom he could ride about, and who would carry on the inheritance, of which he was so tender. I thought of this ; and I also thought that he was, at least, fortunate in his daughter. There was no mistaking the affection with which she looked up into his face.

CHAPTER IV

At last the action was ripe for trial, and on a certain Monday afternoon early in June, it stood in the paper for the next day.

We had a full-dress consultation that afternoon, at the chambers of Mr. Pennell Rye, K.C., the senior of our two leading counsel. Our second leader was my old acquaintance, Mr. Bellamy Orme, K.C. His introduction into the case had been made in a violent hurry. Empson and Dudley had discovered, two or three weeks before, that Sawyer had briefed Frant, a common-law leader, as well as the plaintiff's two Chancery men, and thereupon, they had insisted upon doing the like. The selection of Orme was their own, and had been made notwithstanding a remonstrance on my part. Gladiators of his kind are out of place in a Chancery Court, where there is no jury to be bamboozled.

It was Orme's newspaper reputation which had led my clients to brief him as our cross-examiner. Moatsbridge is a sleepy place, with not much litigation stirring, and Orme is one of the best advertised men at the Bar. He is before the public all the

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year round, in some of the weekly newspapers, and when a sensational divorce case is in progress, the picturesque reporter makes an idol of him. At these times, certain of the evening papers blazon forth his performances, trumpet tongued : “K.C. ON THE WARPATH!—ORME GETS HOME WITH CABBY!—BELLAMY MAKES THE FUR FLY!” are not unfair examples of their raptures. The popular estimate of a barrister—or a judge, either, for that matter—is nearly always in inverse ratio to his reputation in the profession, but Empson and Dudley were among the uninstructed, and they refused to be enlightened. The prospect of seeing Bellamy Orme at close quarters with Oldroyd’s witnesses, and making the fur fly, was too alluring.

Orme in Lincoln’s Inn was a pale shadow of the boisterous, back-slapping Orme of King’s Bench Walk. His bearing to Trout and me during the wait in Rye’s clerk’s room, was distant, not to say chilly, so long as he was within earshot of the rest of the party. But when, by a dexterous manœuvre, he had managed to get the old clerk into a corner to himself, he did prompt homage for the hundred guinea brief. “A very pleasant gentleman, Mr. Orme;” was Trout’s whisper when he came back to my side.

We were quite a large party in Rye’s big room in Stone Buildings. Besides the three counsel, and old Trout and myself, we had Ellers and two of the engineers. The brief was an enormous pile of papers, but it was soon manifest that Rye had mastered it.

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As he talked to Siderfin, who had been soaking in the litigation for more than a year, one could see that he had not only got up the detail of the case, but had taken a bird's-eye view of it as a whole and had settled in his mind the relative importance of all the parts. Only a first-class man can do this.

Bellamy Orme chimed in now and then, when the facts were being dealt with ; but, when the law came under discussion, he sat with his great head lolling back on his armchair and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. This was his attitude during most of our hour and a half, for the talk was nearly all on the law.

It was an intellectual treat to watch Rye as Siderfin fed him with authorities from a long list, which the junior had compiled. Now and then, he would get up and refer to a report, and perhaps, bring the volume to the table, where he kept a store of bookmarks ; but more often he knew the case as soon as the name was mentioned. "I've got that, Siderfin," he would say, with one of his pleasant, easy laughs and a glance towards a great pile of books, strapped up in readiness for the morrow. Or, "No, no, that won't do ;" would come out with another laugh and a shake of the head. Once or twice, when he rejected some pet authority, which had done duty in Siderfin's opinions, the junior would make a fight for it, but he never carried his point. "I agree ;" was Rye's answer on one of these occasions ; "but it's no use with our judge. I've been citing it to

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Selby any time these ten years. He won't have it." But generally Siderfin let the authority go overboard without protest, though he pursed up his lips and drew in his lantern jaws, as he sat with the great brief between his feet. He had a respect for his leader's law, and he knew that, as a tactician, he was unapproachable—a man who never took a bad point and never missed a good one.

Rye had been leader of the court for many years. Though he had never been offered a seat upon the Bench, and it was now too late in the day for him to expect one, he had, at least, the satisfaction of knowing that everybody felt that he had deserved a judgeship, and that nothing but sheer ill-luck had withheld it. "What a shame it is that X (or Y or Z, as the case might be) should be a judge and Rye shouldn't," was a current saying in the profession. Luck is as important a factor at the end of a barrister's career as it is at the beginning. Everything may be in a man's favour: standing, learning, and the esteem of his fellows, and the coveted judgeship may seem within his grasp; when lo! the political machine at Westminster will put forward one of its inexorable demands, and somebody, not worthy to tie his shoe-strings, will go up over his head.

Rye was getting on in years and he was a man of easy fortune, but a fondness for his judge and his work kept him from retirement. He had a temper that nothing could ruffle, and a mental agility that

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seemed out of character with the curve of his waist-coat, and the almost sleepy serenity of his face. Learned he was, and a hard worker, though he seemed to take things easily, and he was genial and courteous to all.

At the consultation that afternoon, he was as much at home with the engineers as he was with Siderfin. Their calculations had no terrors for him. "I've got that among my papers ; haven't I : it comes to so-and-so ; doesn't it ?" he would say, when one or the other of them, in answer to a question from Orme or Siderfin, had made a dive into a black bag, and was beginning to expound the tabular statement, which had been fished out.

I think Ellers derived immense satisfaction from that consultation. He had been led to expect, possibly by his brother, that Rye would know very little about the case. At the beginning, his astonishment at our leader's intimate knowledge of the facts made his face an amusing study ; and when his look of amazement had worn off, he sat like one entranced, and drank in every word that Rye uttered ; law and all.

The law of the case was of almost baffling intricacy. I was out of my depth over and over again, as Rye and Siderfin sat discussing the authorities, and more than once I found myself gazing out of window upon the green lawns, with my brains wool-gathering.

During a moment's silence, Orme electrified us all by emitting a gurgling sound, that was something

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between a choke and a snort. He instantly jerked himself upright, and in the flurry of the moment, he fixed poor Trout with his eye, as if inviting him, at the peril of his life, to bring forward a charge of drowsiness. Even Ellers smiled ; though from that moment, he conceived a violent antipathy to the huge occupant of the armchair.

Empson was to have come to town, with Trout as his assistant to help with the documents and shepherd the local witnesses, but at the last moment, the principal broke down, and was ordered by his doctor to take a month's complete rest. The clerk had, therefore, to come up without him.

Accommodation for the witnesses from Constable, some twenty in number, had been engaged at a hotel in Charterhouse Square. Trout had convoyed them thither before attending the consultation, and he ought to have arranged to put up with them. Here, however, the letter of his duty clashed with his domestic affection, for he had a married daughter living at Camberwell. He easily obtained my promise to have the flock looked after ; and on the strength of this, Ellers, who was a very good-natured man, set him free to enjoy the society of his grandchildren.

It was at about half-past eight that evening that I strolled to Charterhouse Square. In a corner of the smoking-room, an apartment upholstered in plush, I found a group of six or seven elderly men, evidently villagers. No doubt the younger members of the flock

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had sought amusement outside. The party in the corner looked forlorn and exceedingly discontented. I identified Thrift in a moment—a very old man, exactly like one of Leech's superannuated agricultural labourers, except that, instead of a smock frock, he wore a black tail coat with flapped side pockets. His pale blue eye gleamed with the light of battle, as soon as I had made myself known.

"If so be as you're here from Mr. Trout, we want to have a word with you," he said, crossing his hands over his stick.

Feeling sure that there was thunder in the air, I seated myself opposite him. The rest of the group moved their chairs so as to form a semicircle round us. I was not sorry that the other occupants of the room were few, and that they were out of earshot.

The venerable spokesman began by reminding me that he and his companions had been brought away from their homes; did I understand that? On my assuring him that I did, he went on to lay down the general proposition that we all liked to be made comfortable. Admitting this, I ventured to inquire whether there had been anything to complain of in their evening meal? Zachary scratched his head, as if searching for a grievance; but the rest took the answer out of his mouth. Everything had been excellent. A little man with stiff, iron-grey whiskers was unstinted in his praise of the catering.

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" You said yourself, Mr. Thrift, as the little fishes was quite a treat," he urged.

" I'm not sayin' they warn't better than the beef, Goosey," growled the old man.

After this, we got to the point. When folks was called away from their homes, and had a long evenin' afore 'em, and they was together-like, it warn't usual to expect 'em to smoke their pipes quite dry, nor yet to ask 'em to put their hands in their own pockets.

" Certainly not," said I, warmly.

Then if so be as a drop wasn't amiss, Mr. Thrift was certain sure that the Squire would wish 'em to have it.

I was equally sure on this point; but before I could say more, Zachary had resumed his parable, as if fearful lest his grievance should be removed before he had fully aired it.

" Mr. Goosey here, was sayin' in the railway train, as when his son was brought up to London for a witness, they was allowed two drinks—two drinks outside their meals, mind you!"

" But it was the old Queen's proctor, as brought *them* up, Mr. Thrift," interposed Goosey, who seemed to be a man of singularly fair mind.

The patriarch received this interruption with a face as sour as a crab-apple.

" Mr. Thrift ain't sayin' our Squire can be expected to do the same as the old Queen, Goosey,"

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put in another villager ; Blencowe the constable, as I afterwards discovered. “ ‘No drinks was arranged for,’ was what the gentleman in the frock coat said. No drinks, at all !”

This was put forward as a suggestion for compromise, but the old gentleman was not inclined to retire one inch from his position.

“ Two drinks won’t break the Squire ; they won’t look much alongside o’ the lawyers’ bills,” he croaked, with a cock of his eye in my direction. “ But, howsumever that be, we’ll see what the Squire says himself to-morrow mornin’. Failing him, I’ll speak to our Miss Doris.”

“ You’ll get me into trouble,” said I, meekly.

Thrift gave another cock of his eye, and surveyed me with an expression which seemed to say that this was no concern of his.

“ My instructions were to have all proper arrangements made for your comfort. It’s my fault that the manager didn’t know better.”

“ The gentleman can’t speak fairer than that, Mr. Thrift,” suggested Goosey, who was, I think, beginning to suspect that my position in the social scale was somewhat higher than Trout’s.

“ What’s the gentleman going to do ?” was Zachary’s answer. His manner suggested that he saw in the gentleman nothing better than a smooth-tongued hypocrite, who meant to do nothing, and his old face was inscrutable as a mummy’s, but he was

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beginning to fumble in one of his side pockets as if in search of smoking materials.

"I'm sure there's nobody here who takes more than is good for him," I began, as I looked round the semicircle of honest country faces. "I'm sure Mr. Thrift will tell me that."

"You can tell the gentleman that, Mr. Thrift."

It was a fourth villager who spoke this time; one Sims, the postman. "*Sewer-ly, Mr. Thrift!*" he added, persuasively; seeing that no answer was forthcoming.

Zachary was filling his pipe from a brass tobacco-box when I made the appeal to him for his corroboration. That appeal went straight to the mark. Slowly and deliberately he lit his pipe when he had put it between his lips. Slowly and deliberately he puffed at it as he cast his eye round the semicircle. It lingered for a moment when it reached the face of the last speaker, and every man held his breath. But charity prevailed. He passed on to the next face; and when the survey was complete, he gave everybody a clean bill of health.

"There aren't one; not one!" he said solemnly.

"Then I'm sure Mr. Ellers would wish you to call for what you want," said I, inwardly resolving to have the hotel bill sent to me every morning. "I'll see that the manager understands. I'll interview him at once."

When I came back from the office, it was evident

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that some conflict with Zachary had been in progress during my absence.

"I aren't a-goin' to do it: right's right! you always was a fool, Goosey," fell on my ear as I approached the corner.

"We shouldn't like the Squire to think as we was in any way discontented," said Goosey.

"No! No! No!" came from all the rest, Zachary excepted.

"We was only backin'-up Mr. Thrift," said Sims, the postman, who was evidently something of a time-server. Zachary compressed his lips upon the stem of his pipe, but said nothing.

"But Mr. Thrift was quite right," said I.

"We thought it better to speak out." This was Goosey.

"Arn't that what God A'mighty give us our tongues for?" rasped out the old man.

"Don't you think you'd all be more comfortable if you had a room to yourselves?" I asked, struck by a sudden suspicion that the party was finding the plush upholstery somewhat overpowering. "When you come to talk the case over among yourselves, you won't want to be overheard," I added mysteriously. Even Zachary's parchmenty face brightened as I spoke.

There was no difficulty in meeting their wishes. The manager had an excellent room on the first floor, which was quite at our service. We went up in a body and inspected it. It was of a good size; oilclothed all

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over, and boasting a piano: a club-room, evidently. Thrift surveyed it, leaning on his stick, and admitted that it would do. The party ranged themselves round the stove; Zachary, in an armchair in the middle, puffed at his pipe with a self-complacency not far removed from arrogance.

By this time I was basking in the sunshine of a well-earned popularity, and the fact that Goosey's chair-back gave way, enabled me to depart in a blaze of triumph.

"No doubt Mr. Thrift and his grandson can mend it," said I—"if they've brought their saw with them."

The job was one that called for nothing more than a glue-pot, but a man must not stick at trifles when he means to be witty. The success of the joke was not instantaneous, but it was genuine and lasting.

The waiter appeared as I was taking my leave, and stationed himself, expectant, beside the middle chair. Zachary looked askance at him and pondered.

"I'll take a drop of gin," he said, smacking his lips; "it's a merry-go-down as I'm a-wantin' to-night. You'll be callin' for a drop of ale, Goosey," he added, with a sour significance that was not lost upon the company.

CHAPTER V

I MAINTAIN that it is a fresh and leafy walk from Gray's Inn Square to the Courts on a morning in early June ; let him laugh who will !

There are young planes in the square, and above the hall roof there are the topmost branches of the old planes on the other side. Turning to the right, one passes the gardens, stretching far enough away to show towards the north end, the faint blue vapour of country distances. I will admit that neither Warwick Court, nor Holborn, as one crosses over to Chancery Lane, nor the lane itself, can lay claim to anything sylvan. But two minutes after leaving Gray's Inn gardens behind, a man can reach Stone Buildings and see the trees of Lincoln's Inn ahead of him. And for the rest of his walk through the Inn—past the chapel, past the Old Hall, and round two sides of New Square—it is foliage all the way. Then, he has but to dive through number seven of the square, and the north entrance to the Courts is right in front of him, on the other side of Carey Street.

The Royal Courts of Justice are a busy hive when half-past ten is drawing near. Through the corridors,

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with their faint odour of eucalyptus, pass all sorts and conditions of men ; barristers of every type, many of them moving briskly, to reach their places in time for the usher's "*Silence ! Silence !*" which heralds the entrance of the judge ; solicitors and their clients—apparently a little disputatious in some instances—witnesses staring round them at the unaccustomed scene, and not rarely wandering about like sheep astray ; barristers' clerks and boys, bending under the weight of brief-bags and volumes of reports ; solicitors' clerks of every grade, and the great unclassifiable residuum ; the people to whom a law court is the best of all free shows. Under the clock, in the corridor which gives upon the north balcony of the great central hall, loiter the shorthand writers ; expert labourers standing in the market-place ; good men and trusty, with a hawk eye for a possible employer.

But though the life, surging in courts and corridors is of to-day, and an atmosphere of the twentieth century is over all, no man in whom there burns a spark of the historic sense, can breathe that atmosphere and think only of the present. The majesty of the surroundings will bring home to him the antiquity and the continuity of the law of England, and will summon up a cloud of memories. He will feel that the courts of King Edward are but a link in a chain ; a chain which has for other of its links, the laws of Alfred, the grey hall of Rufus, the Magna Charta, and the Habeas Corpus.

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Half-past ten was so nigh as I passed in from Carey Street, on the morning when *Oldroyd v. Ellers* stood in the paper for the first time, that the hum and bustle of the corridors had died down. In the court to which I made my way, there was still a buzz of talk, and much arranging of papers, and running to and fro with bags and books; but the hand of the clock was trembling upon the verge of the half-hour, and one knew that in his room, giving upon the long silent corridor behind the bench, Mr. Justice Selby had changed his coat and waistcoat and donned his robes, and was all ready to make his entrance. Presently he came in, fresh and brisk; and after bowing to the Bar and to the registrar, he took his seat and opened his note-book. A minute later the trial of *Oldroyd v. Ellers* had begun.

Peacock had kept a place for me in the "well," just in front of Rye and a little to the right of Orme. Trout was on my left, with a pile of papers breast-high before him, and three or four boxes on the floor. Ellers was on his left. I had had the forethought to arrange the order of our seats; I like to have a buffer between myself and my litigant, whenever feasible. Messrs. Empson and Dudley's representative was only too pleased to occupy the place of honour next to the client. Miss Ellers was in the public gallery high up at the back of the court.

Mr. Slocombe, K.C., the senior of Oldroyd's three counsel, after going at some length into the facts,

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went on to say that, with his lordship's permission, he proposed to submit a few propositions of law before calling his witnesses. These propositions proved to be about twelve in number, and they involved much reference to authority. It was soon manifest that no witnesses would be called that day.

On turning my head to get a view of the body of the court, I saw that Tommy Murchison had come down to support me, and had introduced himself to Thrift. The old man was sitting at the end of one of the back rows. Goosey was beside him, and the rest of our village witnesses were in their neighbourhood. On the other side of the court sat a solid cohort of Oldroyd's supporters. There seemed to be an invisible line drawn down the middle of the rows occupied by the two forces; and it was evident that a tacit arrangement had been come to that neither of them should encroach within a foot of it. Oldroyd's witnesses were even more numerous than ours. I could identify Crimp the blacksmith; a burly giant with a gleaming set of teeth. He seemed to diffuse good-humour all around him; but even he could not cast an eye across the invisible barrier without, at once, betraying symptoms of hostility and defiance.

When I next looked round, Tommy Murchison was seated between Thrift and Goosey. He was evidently explaining the proceedings to them, and there was a mischievous light in his blue eyes. I

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wondered how the old man would receive the inventions of Tommy's fertile brain. A little later, however, I could see that it was only Goosey who was being victimized. Tommy was whispering in his ear, and he was listening with his eyes glued upon Slocombe, and his iron-grey whiskers bristling with horror. There was nothing in the learned counsel's record or personal appearance to justify such an emotion as this, and his occupation for the time being seemed innocence itself; he was reading and expounding Lord Wensleydale's judgment in *Embrey v. Owen*. I thought I saw Thomas give Zachary a nudge, as if to draw attention to Goosey's horrified countenance; and beyond a doubt, the old man cocked his eye towards his comrade; and though the nut-cracker face never relaxed, he seemed to find enjoyment in the spectacle.

When one o'clock was approaching, the propositions of law were still in course of statement, and a rampart of open reports was steadily rising round the judge. I was consoling myself with the reflection that the court would rise for lunch in half an hour, when Rye passed a note to me. It came from my articled clerk, and it ran as follows: "*Is there any reason why the witnesses shouldn't go to lunch? They want to have time for a smoke afterwards. I can see to them.*"

Trout caught at the suggestion, and Ellers, who also read the note, laughed heartily. My nodded "Yes" was followed by a great shuffling of feet in

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the background, and a moment later, our cohort was tramping out; Tommy leading, with Zachary on his arm. The Oldroyd phalanx followed them with envious eyes.

There was another mighty trampling when our witnesses came back. This was about a quarter of an hour after the court had returned from lunch. They cast glances of triumph across the barrier line as they took their seats; two or three of the younger ones puffing derisively at imaginary pipes. Oldroyd's men had not been released until one-thirty, and they were on duty again by two o'clock. A certain tendency to somnolence was pretty general in both camps during the afternoon. Zachary slept peacefully from two-thirty until the court rose. Slocombe was still stating and supporting the propositions of law.

The legal arguments continued through the whole of the second day; for when Slocombe had run down, and Pickersgill, Oldroyd's Chancery junior, after premising that he had only a very few words to add to his friend, Mr. Slocombe's, argument, had addressed the court for an *ur-strewn* hour and a half, Rye was invited to have an innings, and he was not out when four o'clock arrived.

Our witnesses, shepherded by Tommy, had taken a prolonged lunchtime; and Oldroyd's had done the like under the superintendence of Sawyer's clerk. Butterfield told me that they had insisted upon being put upon an equal footing with the enemy. The

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refectory of Tommy's party was a gothic apartment leading out of the refreshment bar, hard by the court. The other party went elsewhere; the ill-feeling between the two villages made it unadvisable for the rival hosts to be thrown together more than was absolutely necessary. The expert witnesses on both sides were of course, on the best of terms.

As Trout was now firmly established in his daughter's house, I thought it well, after dinner that evening, to see how things were going on in Charterhouse Square. So far, the drink bill had been quite satisfactory. The club-room was entered through a lobby with a glass door. Here I paused to make a preliminary survey of my flock.

The homelike appearance of the room came upon me as a surprise. Hats and coats were hanging round the walls; there were books and newspapers strewn about; a small fire was burning in the stove, and a bagatelle-board was open upon the table. Nobody was playing, however, though the room could boast an almost full muster of the cohort. Zachary, with the others grouped about him, sat in his armchair; his feet encased in enormous carpet slippers. A cloud of tobacco hung over the party; satisfaction beamed from every countenance, and every man's gaze was directed to the piano. The object of all this interest was Mr. Thomas Murchison —fair-haired Tommy, who was sitting with his hands still upon the keys, and a happy face turned towards

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his audience. I had heard a clapping of hands and the last notes of a tune, as I turned out of the passage into the lobby.

"Let's have 'un again, Master Tommy; let's have 'un again, right through!"

It was Zachary who spoke—a grinning, animated Zachary; so different from the mummified crab-apple of two evenings before.

"Right you are, uncle!" came from the piano, and a prelude, which I recognized, rose from the keys. "Here's to the Maiden of Bashful Fifteen!" was the tune.

My entrance brought the music to a stop. Tommy jumped up to welcome me, but upon the rest of the company I descended like a wet blanket. The delighted grin faded from off Zachary's face, and all the "good evenings," with which I was greeted, rang miserably hollow. My popularity of Monday did not avail me one whit. Of the six or seven whom I had then benefited, the only one who received me with any approach to real cordiality was Goosey.

Possibly it was tact, and not mischief, which had prompted Tommy to call on me for a song. The absurdity of this request staggered me for a moment, for I was not conscious of having ever uplifted my voice among the minstrels; but Tommy began to play "The Miller of the Dee," and certain happy years, when he was a baby and I used to sing it to him in the nursery, came back to me.

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I felt that I must either depart, or do something to put the company at its ease ; and the fact was, I wanted to stop. I was interested in the bit of village life, transplanted into Charterhouse Square, which I had just stumbled upon ; and, to tell the whole truth, the temptation of hearing Tommy sing is one that I can never resist. There are notes in his voice, which have in them the sound of a voice that is still ; an echo of the days that are no more.

"Let me run through it to myself," said I, crossing the Rubicon.

The next moment I had repented me of my rashness, but it was too late to draw back. Every one seemed to know the tune. There was a clapping of hands, and—"That's for you, Mr. Truepenny ! That's for you, miller!"—sounded from all sides. The tenant of Constable Mill—a burly man, something like Crimp, the Monksmill blacksmith—grinned his appreciation of the compliment, and took the liberty of drinking my health. At this, a good many other glasses were lifted in my honour.

I have said above that Tommy may have called for the song in good faith, but I could find no excuse for his inducing the company to suppose that I had a weakness for airing my voice in public, and that I should have been much chagrined if an opportunity of gratifying this ridiculous vanity had not been offered me. This he did by quips, and cranks, and innuendoes, while I was struggling to recall my words.

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“The Miller of the Dee” was sung at last. I was glad when the ordeal was over; and I must confess that I should have felt better satisfied if my memory had proved less treacherous, and if, after my first hiatus, a member of the audience had not hastened to prompt me whenever I made a pause. It was, too, unlucky that now and again, the accompanist should have lost control of his instrument; for there was no denying that my ditty had suffered almost as much from these lapses on his part as it had from my own defaults, or the misdirected benevolence of Master Blencowe. And again, “The Miller of the Dee” is not a comic song; and, therefore, it had been of no encouragement to me, to behold the accompanist in agonies of suppressed laughter whenever the prompter put me out.

But, however deplorable my effort may have been from an artistic point of view, I felt that it had answered its purpose. Now I could sit me down, and smoke my pipe among the good people of Constable-Abbotts, without feeling that I was a kill-joy.

They were polite enough to give me a hearty round of applause when the end was reached; and upon my regretting that I had not done a fine old song more justice, Sims assured me that he had heard it sung worse—ay, that he had, many and many a time! Goosey said that he had the words “somewheres at home,” and he promised that his granddaughter should copy them out for me on his return. Zachary

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uttered neither praise nor blame. "Now, Master Tommy," was all that he said; and thereupon every man's face lit up and became joyous.

"Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen;
Here's to the widow of fifty;
Here's to the flaunting extravagant quean,
And here's to the housewife that's thrifty."

With Tommy's sweet, fresh voice soaring upward in the old song, the good folk might well look happy! The chorus came with a crash, and every glass went up with it—

"Let the toast pass!
Drink to the lass!
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass."

Zachary seemed half beside himself as he joined in. His cracked voice rose high above the others, and the leg which hung crossed over its fellow beat time, while his head and right hand both wagged in unison. The grin upon his face during Tommy's solo, baffled description.

"The best song I ever heered; I could listen to 'un all night—that I could, Master Tommy!" he cried, when the last notes had died away; and I could see that his old eyes were resting upon the boy with a sort of parental fondness.

"And to think of him a-bein' that ter'ble fond o' the wummin," he chuckled, turning to Goosey and me, with a leer that laid bare the two old tushes yet remaining to him.

The little man with the grey whiskers was about

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to say something; but he thought better of it, and took a long pull at his pipe instead.

Tommy blushed at finding himself thus identified with his poet.

"But I was only singing it," he said, laughing.

Zachary took no notice of this. "I've had fower wives myself, Master Tommy," he went on, proudly; all agog to make Thomas understand that he, too, was no misogynist.

"You're like the man in the song, Mr. Thrift," put in the miller—

*"If I survive,
Then I'll have five."*

That's what he said."

"Good luck to 'un!" shrieked the old man, slapping the arm of his chair—

*"If I survive,
Then I'll have five."*

"But you ain't likely to survive," remonstrated the ever-faithful Goosey. "Your missis; why bless me! she must be a matter o' forty year younger than you be, Mr. Thrift."

"Who put that into your silly head?" demanded the other, in high dudgeon. "Ain't I a matter o' twenty or five-and-twenty year older than *you*?"

"But it was your missis, not me—" began Goosey, in no wise ruffled by the slight cast upon his intelligence, and desperately anxious to follow the drift of his friend's argument.

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"Who wants to listen to your cacklin'; with Master Tommy at the pianner?" snapped the patriarch. "You give us a song, miller! 'The girl I left behind me in the land where I was born.' That's a good song! Master Tommy'll like that."

Tommy soon picked up the tune; and to his accompaniment, we all sang the chorus of "The Old Emigrant," solemnly and in very slow time—

"Oh, the long, long English twilight, and the redness of the morn!
Oh, the may trees in the hedgerows and the poppies in the corn,
And the girl I left behind me in the land where I was born!"

"He was a-sheep-farmin' in Orstralia. That's what he was a-doin'. Same as my nevvy," said Thrift, when the song was done.

He was filling his pipe as he spoke.

"You mind him; don't you, Goosey?" he added, after he had lit up.

But the conscientious Goosey was too busy weighing the evidence of the farmer's domicile, to notice this inquiry.

"I'm not sayin' it wasn't Orstralia, Mr. Thrift," he said humbly, as soon as he had completed a mental review of the song; "I dare say it *was* Orstralia; only it don't say so—do it, now?"

Luckily for him, Zachary had lost all interest in the subject. He was listening, with his head on one side, to Tommy, who was picking out a tune with two fingers.

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"He's 'The Lincolnshire Turnip Hoer!' he's 'The Lincolnshire Turnip Hoer!' that's what he is," shrilled the old man in a tone of delighted recognition; "I haven't heered 'un since I was a boy——

" 'The vlie : the vlie !
The vlie is on the turmut,
And it's all my eye, for you to try
To get him off the turmut.' "

His old voice rose and fell in a quaver, and he marked the time by a slow, drawing movement of both hands.

Tommy sang "The Turnip Hoer ;" and when the chorus came, the villagers all plied imaginary hoes ; Thrift acting as fugleman.

"Turnips too ! Think of 'un knowing about turnips, and him a lawyer ! It's won'erful ! Won'erful ! "

The old man said this with uplifted hand, and an adoring look into Tommy's face. The object of all this homage played the chorus through once again, and then drew a chair close up to his worshipper.

I had turned to the miller, and asked him a question about the alleged raising of his weir. This reference to the action was like putting fire to tow. Half a dozen men answered me offhand, and another half-dozen struck in when I pushed my inquiry a little further. Hardly a man could sit in his chair, but Zachary, the most enthusiastic partisan of all, paid no heed. He was wholly absorbed in his conversation

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with Tommy. The subject of their talk was the cultivation and preservation of the potato.

After this, Jarvis, an under-keeper, gave us a song ; a dreadful old music-hall song, "He's a Masher, but his Mother keeps a Mangle." Then, Ben Thrift, in whose rosy, sunburnt countenance one could trace a dim resemblance to Zachary's inscrutable old face, favoured us with "Tom Bowling."

"Now we're ready for *your* song, uncle," said Thomas, coaxingly.

"Noa, noa," answered the patriarch, smiling, and shaking his head.

"Just one!" urged Tommy. "Just one little one!"

"Noa, noa!" repeated Thrift, but with a leer, that was an invitation to the other to stick to him.
"Noa, noa, Master Tommy!"

But the excellent Goosey was a stranger to all such wiles as these. In the innocence of his heart, he hastened to support his friend.

"It ain't no kindness to press him, sir," he remarked. "It's askin' an old gentleman to do what he can't do. Why, bless me! Mr. Thrift's singin' days was over long afore you was born."

Zachary fixed him with his eye, but said nothing. Then he turned towards grandson Ben, and meditated.

"Can I, think ye?" he asked, at length.

Benjamin knew what was expected of him, but he had the family credit to consider.

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"N-oa," he answered slowly.

"Then I'll sing 'Sergeant Cawmill,' was the defiant retort.

And sing it he did, nine or ten verses in all, and the quavering old voice held out to the end. The song told of how, in the days when Napoleon's army of invasion was at Boulogne, a redoubtable Scottish sergeant called out his section of Hampshire volunteers upon a fictitious alarm, and how, having marched them for miles and spread them about a wood, with instructions to be ready, he himself strolled home to make love to their sweethearts. Such was the fable, which required for its development some ten eight-line verses, together with a chorus, which, relevant or irrelevant, came in after every one of them—

"A-rub, a-dub, a-doo !
We're marchin' two and two :
There's owd Phil Thompson fra' the sawmill ;
There's Peters and there's Holt,
There's Rogers and there's Rolt,
And—there's SAIRGEANT ALISTER MACPHAIRSON CAWMILL."

There was always a screech in the last line; but the old man's vitality was so amazing, that he seemed none the worse for his exertions.

"I done him!" he exclaimed, with a triumphant chuckle, and a thump of his stick. "I done him, Goosey!"

The exemplary moderation of the hotel drink bill was explained to me before the gathering broke up.

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Soon after "Sergeant Cawmill," Sims began to edge towards the mantelpiece. Zachary's eye was upon him, but the old man said nothing until the other's hand was upon the bell rope.

"You've had your two, Sims," he snarled.

"But I'm that dry, Mr. Thrift; and I've just got a noo pipe—look here!" And Sims held out a long show-white churchwarden.

"If you must have a drop, you take a drink out o' Goosey's glass; he's got plenty."

"Be fair, Sims! I've been savin' it up for the last," said poor Goosey, as he passed over the tumbler.

We had "Merrie Sherwood" for the last song; and Tommy's singing of that wail of the town-dweller for the countryside was enough to bring tears into the eyes of Dr. Johnson himself. Goosey, whose occupation lay in the Constable woods, was so moved that he could not trust himself to join in the chorus. The others sang it with a subdued fervour that was quite pathetic—

"Country-born and country-bred,
Are we sleeping; are we dead?
I am waiting, O my children! comes the call
From the woodlands far away;
And we'll answer and obey;
And we'll meet in Merrie Sherwood, after all—after all—
We'll be happy, happy, happy, after all!"

"You aren't a-singin', Goosey," croaked Zachary, with a poke of his stick in the poor man's ribs.

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Goosey's autocrat took leave of Tommy as if he could hardly bear to part with him. He insisted on seeing us downstairs; hanging on the boy's arm, and discoursing of "taters" all the way.

"You must harvest 'un yourself; you *must* do it yourself. Spread 'un out in the sun for one day. Then put 'un in the bin along of your slack lime—plenty o' slack lime, Master Tommy!—and they'll keep beautiful; beautiful they will!"

CHAPTER VI

ON the third day of the trial, Oldroyd's first witness was put into the box. This was Hemmingway, a Yorkshire engineer and a personal friend of the plaintiff. For the next three hours it rained tabular statements, and the court wallowed in figures. Orme's attempt to break the witness down was such a failure that Rye took the cross-examination of the rest of the plaintiff's engineers into his own hands. The gladiator from King's Bench Walk was not used to expert witnesses, and the weapons which might have proved effective in the case of a police constable, or a private detective, or even a follower of the stage or the turf, broke harmless against Hemmingway's armour of technical knowledge, rough humour, and unbounded self-esteem.

"Now, let's take a common-sense view," suggested the witness at one stage of the tussle. "What a machine can do one day, it can do another. It's not like a man."

At a later stage, he gave a long technical answer, and then held up a penny manual. "It's all here Mr. Orme. It's what the children use in our schools," said he.

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Orme blustered and blundered on for some time, but at last he fairly lost his temper; and when Hemmingway began to dissect a question before answering it, the gladiator appealed to Cæsar.

"You'd better answer the question, and discuss it with Mr. Orme afterwards," said Selby, briskly, with the slight smack of the lips which was one of his characteristics.

Things went more smoothly for a few minutes, but presently there was another tussle; and this time all the honours remained with the witness.

"Give me an answer, sir; yes or no!" thundered Orme.

The Yorkshireman put on an expression of abject helplessness, and he stretched out both hands as if pleading for mercy.

"But I can't answer it, Mr. Orme. How *can* I? It's asking me why water always runs uphill."

After this, Ellers was so anxious that Orme should take no more expert witnesses that I felt bound to give Rye a hint on the subject. My whispered communication was received with a slight droop of one eyelid, and a ghost of a half-smile.

"What will Orme say?" he whispered back under cover of his hand; but I saw that he meant to follow Ellers' wishes. Probably he felt that he would be failing in his duty to the client if he did not.

My belief is that Orme was well pleased when he

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found that his leader meant to cross-examine the rest of the engineers. A big brief in chancery was a windfall which he had never had before, and which he was never likely to have again, and there was no advertisement of the kind he valued, to be got out of *Oldroyd v. Ellers*. Under the circumstances, it probably suited him very well to sprawl within the bar of Selby's court, day after day, doing nothing.

"It's the softest job I ever had in my life," he said to me one evening at the club. "It isn't often I get a chance of doing a bit of sugaring; I earn my bread in the sweat of my brow. But here's Rye earning it for me. He seems fond of the labouring oar."

"He's pulling it, anyhow," said I, laughing.

"More power to his elbow! say I. He can do my work—shure and he's welcome to it! but—" here the big man winked and put his finger to his nose—"he can't draw my fees. One hundred guineas on the brief, twenty a day, and four consultations, down to now! No, no! that goes into *my* little money-box; that goes *here*," quoth Bellamy Orme, slapping his pocket and rumbling with laughter.

The fifth day of the trial was over when this was said, but the plaintiff's case gave no sign of finishing. Oldroyd had not proved anything against us that could be called a surprise, and as regards his most important grievance—the diversion of water near the mill—our legal position still seemed a strong one. But as witness after witness went on to prove how

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seriously the alterations made of recent years, both at the mill and at the intake of the goit, had diminished the supply to Monksmill House and Longman's meadows, one felt an uncomfortable foreboding that such a wrong had been inflicted as the law would find some means of remedying ; and as day after day went by, the thought of what the losing party would have to pay in costs, grew more and more oppressive. But it was of no use to worry over the state of affairs ; for the wheels of litigation, once started, must grind on to the end, unless one party or the other can and will take steps to stop them. In the present case, neither plaintiff nor defendant was ready or willing to make an offer of compromise ; and therefore the future seemed to promise nothing better than a fight to the bitter end—a continuance of the trial over a long succession of days at an expenditure in costs quite frightful to contemplate ; then a judgment for one party or the other, and after that, very likely, an appeal.

I thought of these things one afternoon two days later, as I sat going through and rearranging a mass of documents which had fallen into disorder. The plaintiff's case was still unfinished in the court hard by ; and the evidence of the witness then under examination had proved so unusually tedious and had threatened to last for so long that I had been thankful to escape for a brief interval. I knew that I should not be wanted for the next hour.

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I was arranging the documents in a room which had been engaged on the defendant's behalf for the storage of our papers during the trial, and for the transaction of any little matters of business which could not be conveniently dealt with outside. The Royal Courts of Justice are honeycombed with rooms like this; unknown to all but the initiated. Honeycombed, too, with rooms which even the initiated rarely enter—dark chambers in the basement, where bookbinders are at work, and light chambers high up under the roof, where the scriveners ply their calling. And there are mysterious winding staircases and dim unfrequented passages, worthy of a medieval fortress. Jurors and witnesses blunder into them sometimes, and wander helplessly until they find a guide, but the initiated know them as mightily convenient short cuts from one part of the labyrinth to another.

The documents were arranged at last, and I thought that I could not better fill up the rest of my hour than by strolling to the Temple fountain.

There are many staircases leading down from the court corridors to the central hall; so many, indeed, that, old stager though I am, I do not know them all. But I took none of these, for near our room, and close beside Mr. Justice Selby's court, was a better way; a short cut to the long vaulted corridor below, which runs at right angles to the hall, and is divided from it by iron gates, always open during business hours. I have a fondness for this corridor because the

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place is like a cathedral crypt, with its dim religious light and the double row of white Norman pillars, which support the red-brick vaulting of the roof. The public knows it not, and the profession uses it so little that one may pass along it a dozen times a day, and, save for an occasional orderly on duty, one may always find it empty.

This afternoon, however, two outsiders had entered into this solitude. They were a man and woman; and, though I could not see them distinctly, it was plain that they were mere saunterers, who were using the place as a promenade. "They've strolled through from here," thought I, as I turned into the hall.

There was a consultation in Stone Buildings after the Court rose that afternoon. We had already assembled there so often that the room was beginning to be as familiar to me as my own. The Hon. John was gloomy; for he saw as well as I did, that for some reason or other, Rye was not satisfied with the course which things had taken that day. Siderfin of the lantern jaws, was too much wrapped up in the authorities, to pay much heed to what may be called the human nature side of the trial, but his leader was a man of the world. Rye knew, too, that we had to deal with a judge who was no mere case-lawyer; and he was beginning to fear that, having regard to the plaintiff's evidence, Selby would feel bound to reconsider the older authorities in the light of the conditions and requirements of the present day, and, without

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'doing violence to any well-established principle of law, he might be able to give the plaintiff a good deal of the relief asked for.

"We must see how it reads as a whole," he said, referring to the day's evidence; "but I confess I didn't like it as it came out bit by bit."

When, that night, I read a transcript of the shorthand note of the day's proceedings, I felt that the general effect of the evidence was very awkward, and once again I thought of the awful cost of the litigation. The print which I held in my hand represented an expense of some ten pounds, and that was a mere drop in the ocean of each day's expenditure.

The eighth and the ninth days came and went, and the plaintiff was still calling witnesses. By this time I had seen so much of the court, and I was so soaked in the case, to the exclusion of nearly all other business, that at times one was conscious of a vague doubt whether any existence prior to the opening of *Oldroyd v. Ellers* had not been a mere dream, and whether the proceedings would not go on, and on, and on, until the end of the chapter.

Mr. Justice Selby was not seen at his best when trying a witness action, but whatever the nature of the business before him might be, no one could watch him on the bench without a feeling of reverence for his great judicial gifts—for his fairness and patience, no less than for his commanding intellect and vast learning. And oh! what a treat it was to hear him

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give judgment on an adjourned summons. The instant that the argument was concluded he would clear his throat and dispose of the matter in language as correct as a book and with an air of relish, that showed how much he enjoyed the exercise of his own powers. The junior bar worshipped him. "Selby isn't an angel," said a stuffgownsman to me during the progress of our trial, "and no doubt he has his preferences; but whether it's Rye who's addressing him, or the humblest junior at the bar, he pays just the same attention."

It is possible that the judge's fear lest some material piece of evidence should be lost, if he interposed in order to cut things short, may have tended to prolong the hearing of *Oldroyd v. Ellers*, but no serious expenditure of time could be put down to this cause. It was the nature of the case that made the trial so prolonged.

CHAPTER VII

THINGS had gone rather better for us on the eighth day, and at the consultation which followed, Ellers had been more cheerful, but on the ninth day we were very badly hit by Crimp, the blacksmith.

The villagers on both sides were fully alive to the importance of this piece of evidence ; and when under cross-examination, the witness stuck to his guns, the two rival camps followed the struggle between him and Orme with breathless interest. When Crimp left the box with his evidence unshaken, there was something like a demonstration in the ranks of Monksmill. He was patted on the back and congratulated in loud whispers ; while on the Constable side of the barrier-line, several of the faces wore an ugly look, and the word "liar," not unqualified by adjectives, was in the air.

That evening I strolled to Charterhouse Square after dining in my own rooms. I wanted to ask True-penny, the miller, a few questions.

June weather had set in at last, and the moon was rising in a dusty purple twilight when I passed out into Holborn. Even the never-ending frontage of

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the Meat Market looked half-mediæval as I sauntered past it. Charterhouse Square, just beyond, with its trees and the glimpses of the Charterhouse which it affords, had all the atmosphere of a cathedral close.

Bagatelle was in full swing when I entered the witnesses' room. Thrift had left his armchair and was seated by the head of the board; wholly engrossed in the game and criticizing every stroke. The night was so warm that the windows were all open. As the miller was one of the bagatelle players, I crossed over to the stove and dropped into a chair by Goosey, and lit my pipe.

"I've been thinkin' over two o' them songs, sir," he said confidentially, as soon as the ball of talk had been set rolling. "I've been thinkin' over them songs, sir; your young gentleman's song about drinkin' to females, whatsoever they was, and Mr. Thrift's own song. I can't help thinkin', sir, as Mr. Murchison didn't mean no harm."

The worthy man said this as if he had been trying his very hardest to think evil of Tommy; but here, I am sure, he did himself an injustice.

"There was no harm in the song," I said.
"There's no harm in the boy either, for that matter."

"But then, sir," he went on, evidently much relieved, "the young gentleman might suppose from what Mr. Thrift said about his song, and what Mr. Thrift sang himself, about the sergeant making love

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here, there, and everywheres, as drinkin' and light behaviour with females wasn't no disgrace."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! That would never do!"

"Mr. Thrift didn't mean no harm; he's a good and virtuous man, sir, though sometimes he talks free," protested the loyal Goosey. "He doesn't always think what a weight his words has, partic'-larly with young persons, through his bein' so old and so wonderful nimble-witted."

"And you're afraid he may have unwittingly corrupted Mr. Murchison's mind," I remarked, in virtuous horror.

"I don't say that, sir; it sounds so bad; but I was a-thinkin' as it couldn't do no harm if you was to say a few words to the young gentleman about the dangers of vicious courses and drinkin'. I mean general-like, sir. No need to mention Mr. Thrift till the last."

"Why mention him at all?"

Goosey looked positively cunning as he unfolded the plan which he had elaborated for Tommy's benefit.

Stated shortly, the details were as follows: after the general remarks of a moral character, I might put it, "so to speak," that it was not because Mr. Thrift had led a bad life that he had attained to such a great age, and was such a "merricle." On the contrary—so I was to put it—it was because he had led such a good life. Goosey was satisfied that if the illustration were brought before Telemachus in

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this forcible manner, he would understand what a good thing a good life was; and incidentally, it would be made plain to him that Mr. Thrift was a person of exemplary character, albeit a little disposed to "talk free" sometimes.

The little man had evidently rehearsed, over and over again, the scene between Tommy and his counsellor. The mingled gravity and persuasiveness of his expression were quite dramatic. It would have been brutal to laugh, but the effort to keep my countenance as I pictured myself taking the part of Mentor, nearly killed me.

"I must turn it over in my mind," was all that I could say.

The game was finished by this time, and players and spectators came over to the stove; Thrift, of course, taking the armchair. I soon got the information which I had come for; and presently the talk began to range over the whole field of the nine days' hearing. The judge had everybody's good word. The miller was sure that, though he didn't say much, he was taking it all in. Thrift admitted this, and he also admitted that Selby was a pleasant-spoken gentleman, and took a lot of heed to what was going on; but he owned to feeling a doubt whether his lordship fully understood that all Oldroyd's witnesses were liars, and ought to have six months in gaol. That they were liars, one and all, was stoutly asserted by everybody. I was grieved to observe that on this

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point, the judicially-minded Goosey was no less positive than his fellows were.

As regards counsel, there was the like unanimity—Slocombe, Frant, and Pickersgill were poor bunglers, while Rye, Orme, and Siderfin (Siddlefin the country folk called him) were masters of their business. Thrift was, perhaps, a little inclined to criticize our stuffgownsman—he was a bit of a taller-face, and he seemed that fond o' readin', his nose was always in a book—but Zachary followed this up by admitting that the learned gentleman had a nice easy voice to listen to; it went through you like a file.

Upon Goosey venturing to remark that Mr. Oldroyd was a fine-looking gentleman, all the others, except Thrift, simply stared at him with indignant pity. Zachary told him, in plain Saxon, that he was a fool.

"I was only sayin' what I thought, Mr. Thrift," pleaded Goosey. "My thoughts is my own."

"Who's a-grudgin' you 'em?" snapped the other. "Such thoughts as yourn be!"

"But you didn't only think it, you said it, Goosey," put in Sims.

"Every man has a right to his thoughts; it's the putting 'em into words Mr. Thrift was talking of," explained the miller.

"No, it warn't," croaked the old man. "What business has 'un to think such tom-fool thoughts as his's? *I'd* as lief think old Harry was good-lookin'."

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After this, there was some excited talk about a conflict, which had taken place outside the court that afternoon. Crimp had begun it by threatening to break every bone in Blencowe's body; and from what fell from one and another, I gathered that there had been a pretty general exchange of hot words. Remembering how our flock had behaved when the blacksmith left the witness-box, and feeling no doubt that Blencowe had provoked that son of Anak, I thought it well to say a few words of warning to the company. They took this in excellent part; but they protested so strongly that they had not been the aggressors, that I promised to mention the matter to Mr. Oldroyd's solicitor. Feeling ran so high against Crimp, that even Goosey showed no sign of disapproval when Zachary, good and virtuous man though he was, coupled a bad word with the blacksmith's name.

The old man went on to rate Blencowe for having taken the threat so quietly.

"I wish he'd said it to me. I wish he'd said it to me," quoth Zachary, nodding over his stick.

"And what would you ha' done, Mr. Thrift?" asked Goosey, open-mouthed.

"I'd ha', broke my stick over 'un," answered the other, with a flourish of the weapon.

"But surely you wouldn't be fighting Crimp," burst in the astonished miller; "why, it ain't in the nature o' things, Mr. Thrift."

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"I arn't afeard of 'un," shrieked the old man, with another wild flourish.

Here, to my astonishment, Goosey came forward as a diplomatist.

"That ain't what Mr. Truepenny means, Mr. Thrift," he said mildly. "It wouldn't be becomin' in an old gentleman like you, to be fightin' and settin' us all such a bad example!"

Zachary seemed to think that there was something in this view of the case; for he put his stick between his knees and crossed his hands over it.

"But I aren't afeared of 'un," he muttered.

Some of the party were preparing to go to bed when I took my leave.

"We shall see you over the way to-morrow morning," said Blencowe to the old man, as he bade him good night.

I understood what he meant; for I had learned from Tommy that it was the custom of the party to spend an hour or so before breakfast, sauntering about the Meat Market. They seemed to regard this amusement as one of the most delightful features of their trip to London.

Zachary gave Blencowe no answer, but I noticed that his old eye sought Goosey's face.

"'Um-m. We'll be there; won't us, Goosey?" he said, with a grin, when the rest of the party was out of earshot.

I was surprised to come upon Ellers as I crossed

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over the roadway in front of the hotel. He was in evening dress, under an overcoat, and he seemed to be walking with feverish haste.

"I wanted to have a word with young Thrift and Jarvis," he explained. "They're not in bed yet, I suppose! It's very good of you to be bothering yourself about the case at this time of night."

"They all seemed just on the move when I left."

"Oh! I won't disturb them. I can write a note when I get back. And it isn't at all important. I want to send those two home to-morrow morning. The truth is," he went on, "I came out more to see you. I've been to your chambers, but the door was shut. Can you give me a few minutes?"

"We may as well take a turn round the square," said I. "Isn't it a pleasant place on a night like this?"

"I remember coming here years ago, to see a boy at the school," he said, as we sauntered under the trees. "But that was in winter; the place looked desolate enough then."

For a few minutes we strolled on, talking about the Charterhouse and Thackeray. I could see that the Hon. John had something to say, which he found it difficult to bring out.

"I'm worried about this action," he said suddenly. "I'm so worried about it that I hardly know what to do."

"You think it's going against us?"

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"I'm afraid it is; Rye seemed so sure this afternoon that the judge was against us. But that isn't all. What do you think about this business at the mill? What's your real opinion—are we right, or are we wrong? That's what I came out to ask you."

"I can't make up my mind; but even if we're wrong, it's quite impossible that what's been done can have had half the effect their engineers make out."

"Oh yes, I feel sure there's great exaggeration; but has it had any serious effect at all? That's the point."

"I think they have proved that."

Ellers stopped dead, and stood staring at the ground, with his hands behind his back.

We were nearly opposite the great mullioned window of the Charterhouse, and the moon was so bright that one could see the Sutton coat carved above it. One could also see every detail of the vane on the squat chapel tower, which showed through the gap, just east of the window. There was hardly a sound audible in the square; and I thought how dead the silence must be in the courts and passages of the old foundation which lay behind, and how the moon must be shining in upon the great hall, where the poor brothers dine in company, and upon the chapel, with its old oak and Sutton's monument—"There he lies, Fundator Noster, in his ruff and gown, awaiting the great Examination Day."

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"I hadn't the ghost of a suspicion when True-penny raised the weir, to get more power, that it would make any difference," broke out Ellers; "and even now, I can't believe that it has made much."

"He may have been acting within your legal rights, even if it has."

I said this by way of putting out a feeler; I thought I could read what was in his mind.

"Yes, yes, yes, I know that; but——"

Here he stopped and looked uncomfortably into my face. His own was very troubled.

"I think I understand you," said I.

"I'm sure you do. But I'd better put it plainly—we've been too long on the land to do a thing like that."

"Did you think of making an attempt to settle?" I asked, when we had resumed our saunter.

"That's the difficulty. I want to do what's fair; but how is one to deal with a man like Oldroyd? One can't trust him to meet you halfway. It's a humiliating business, at best, to have to approach him at all; and to make advances and have them flung back in your face——" And the Hon. John ended the sentence with a stamp of his foot.

"He may be a bit sick of the action, himself."

"Not he. He's a cross-grained, litigious Yorkshireman; obstinate as a mule. He's rolling in money. The expense is a flea-bite to him, and he must know the case is going in his favour."

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"That may, or may not be. My own opinion is that Slocombe's anything but sure of winning. It's wonderful how different a case looks to the party who sees it from within."

"Can you suggest anything?"

"Slocombe pledged himself this afternoon to finish his case to-morrow. Suppose we wait till then! There's just a chance that something may fall from the judge—some hint of what he thinks the points most against us are. If he does this, we might make an offer on those lines; putting it, of course, that we were anxious to do what his lordship thought fair."

The Hon. John was pleased with this suggestion.

"Possibly," I went on, "Selby may show that he's so seriously against us that the other side will stick out for all they've asked for. We must remember that."

"I'll risk it," said Ellers, now much more cheerful. "It will be a bad thing for me if I have to pay all the costs. I suppose I *ought* to do it."

He uttered this with a sigh, as we were walking along Charterhouse Street on the lookout for a cab. "A bad thing for the inheritance," he added, with another sigh.

"I mustn't bid you good-bye without a word of thanks," he said, as we were about to part; and he went on to say pretty things about my exertions during the trial.

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Had he been winning all along the line, this would have been nothing to his credit; but coming from him as things stood, it did him honour. Litigation is a sport at which there are few such good losers as the Hon. John.

CHAPTER VIII

THE mystery of Thrift's remark to Goosey about the Meat Market was cleared up next morning, when the old man appeared in our room with a handful of fine roses for Miss Ellers. Conveyed by the obedient Goosey, he had toiled to Covent Garden market before breakfast. Distance seemed to have no terrors for Zachary, provided, as he said, that he could take his own time over it.

It was pretty to see him and Doris, whose birthday it was, when he presented the roses with her old gardener's dooty. I found out afterwards that he had kept back one of them. It was concealed in his old-fashioned high hat just then, but a few minutes later it was in Tommy's button-hole.

The boy was introduced to Doris that morning. This was done at her desire, in order that she might thank him for his kindness to the Constable folk—"our people," she called them. In his eyes, the beautiful Miss Ellers was a goddess, and it was in awe and worship that he made his obeisance to her.

"But it's we who ought to thank them," he said, with another blush, "Uncle Chris and I.

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We've had so much fun with them." The boy calls me uncle at home, and the name had slipped out unawares.

On my expressing my entire concurrence in the statement that we had had some fun with the villagers, mademoiselle remarked demurely that she had heard something about it. Tommy swore afterwards that she laughed, and that she was thinking of my song.

After this I stepped over to the other side's room, to make my complaint about the disturbance of the day before.

"You'd better speak to Oldroyd himself," said Butterfield, whom I met at the door. "It's all lies, though."

"You seem to have re-established the feudal system at Monksmill, Mr. Oldroyd," I said to the plaintiff, after Butterfield had introduced us.

"How so?" he asked, laughing. He was a fine type of Yorkshireman; a little portly, perhaps, but stalwart, ruddy, and silver-haired. He was in mourning for his wife, who had died during the progress of the litigation.

"Your vassals treat your quarrel as their own. They've been oppressing our poor retainers."

"Were we to blame, think you?" he asked, when I had told him what had happened. No names had been mentioned.

I merely looked at him, but he saw from my face what I thought.

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"I promised to make the complaint," said I. "It seemed only fair to Mr. Crimp." The blacksmith was standing at Oldroyd's elbow at the moment.

"Why fair to Crimp?"

"Well, Mr. Thrift was threatening last night to take the law into his own hands if I didn't complain; and, like Nelson, he meant to tackle the biggest ship."

Zachary was in full view, talking to Tommy; Goosey, of course, was close by.

"He's sportsman enough for anything," said Oldroyd, with a laugh. "I know the old devil!"

I came across the blacksmith again a few minutes later, when I was escorting Miss Ellers to the gallery stairs. He blushed and looked down, but she stopped and held out her hand.

"We needn't be enemies any more, now you've given your evidence—need we? I shouldn't like to think I could never come to the forge again."

Crimp choked and said nothing. There were tears in his eyes as he took the girl's hand.

The trial was resumed at half-past ten. The plaintiff's evidence was to be completed that day, but the case might drag on for many, many days after that. The proceedings opened stormily: there was such a severe tussle between Orme and the first witness, that before long, the rival hosts in the back rows were seething with excitement.

I left court in the middle of the cross-examination.

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I had a call of no great importance to make in the Temple, and I was not sorry to escape into the open air for a few minutes.

I had strolled down the staircase leading to the vaulted corridor below, and had just turned in the direction of the hall, when I found that unwittingly, I had come upon a boy and girl love-making. He was holding both her hands, and making some sort of appeal to her. She was listening with her face averted, and neither of them saw me. I paused involuntarily at a sight so strange in that place; and though it was only for a flash, the girl looked up, and I recognized her. It was Doris Ellers.

She also recognized me; and seeing that I was passing on, she called me by my name. I stood much embarrassed; for her cheeks were dyed with blushes and tears were trembling in her eyes. The boy was a fine specimen of humanity; well grown, and with the bearing of a gentleman. I could pardon the awful wrath with which he was glaring at poor me.

"I'm very sorry," I said; and then we all three stood tongue-tied.

"This is Mr. Charles Oldroyd," said the girl at last, in a sort of desperation.

"Mr. Charles Oldroyd!" I echoed, too much amazed to know what I was saying. And then a full understanding of the situation burst upon me. I knew by this time that I had seen the same pair three days

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before, and I understood what had been happening. While the strife between the two fathers had been raging in the court above, these young people had been sauntering among the pillars; shepherd and shepherdess in an Arcadia all their own. And at that very moment, not many feet overhead, the conflict was still raging. Ellers was sitting there; his mind full of doubt as to the justice of his cause, and full of anxiety to do what was right, if only he could find a way; and behind him, there were the two companies of villagers simmering with wrath and jealousy, while Orme blustered and bellowed at the Monksmill witness in the box. What Oldroyd's feelings were as he sat in his place, a yard or so from Ellers, I did not know; but it was only reasonable to suppose that they were not very amicable.

"I suppose you must tell my father," faltered the girl.

"I don't know what my duty is, and I'm sure I shall not have to consider. You will tell him yourself, Miss Ellers."

"Oh, please don't cry!" I went on, for I saw that her tears were falling. "I'm sure everything will come right. Don't you know that your father wants to bring that miserable business upstairs, to an end?" I forgot when I said this that the lover belonged to the other side.

"We haven't talked about it for days and days—

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we agreed that we wouldn't—but I've seen how unhappy he is."

"My father's sick of it, too," said young Oldroyd, who had cooled down by now, and who seemed to understand that I meant well.

"I heard father tell Mr. Trout this morning that he was sure the judge was against us," said the girl.

"Slocombe told my father that the judge was against us; and he didn't at all like the look of things," said the boy.

This was enough for me. "Miss Ellers," I said, "if you'll come upstairs to our room I'll bring your father to you, and you must tell him. On my honour, I don't think you ought to lose a minute."

She dried her eyes and went up with me.

"Can you tell father—tell him that you came upon us, and that you've brought me here? It will make it so much easier for both of us," she pleaded.

"It may take a little time," said I; "so don't be uneasy."

There was no difficulty in getting Ellers out of court and into one of the recesses of the corridor; but it was not so easy to broach the matter to him. I did it, however, and he received it like a man in a dream.

"Think it over, Mr. Ellers, for a minute or two before you say anything," was my winding-up; "and remember the talk we had last night! And remember

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that you've never heard any harm of the boy, and perhaps his father isn't quite what you think he is!"

It was rather more than two minutes before Ellers spoke.

"Doris will never change her mind," he muttered absently.

"You won't forget the inheritance," I hinted.
"It will round off the inheritance."

"No, no! I shan't forget the inheritance—our old dower house."

He was still speaking like one half awake.

"Your daughter is in the room here," I said, after another silence. "She is waiting for you. Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes! Oh yes! I'll go to her," he answered, as he started off. "Thank you," he said, coming back and offering his hand.

"Shall I see Mr. Oldroyd?"

I hesitated to make the suggestion, but I did not see how else matters were to be arranged.

"I shall be grateful if you will."

"And I may tell him that you will leave the matter to your daughter, as you have perfect confidence in her?"

"Yes. That is so."

I was debating as to how I could get hold of Oldroyd, when luck stepped in to aid me: I saw him coming out of the court. I made a dash and bore him off into the recess.

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He heard me out, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed upon the floor. In conclusion, I exhorted him to think for two minutes before he spoke.

"This must be a bitter pill for Ellers," he said, looking up.

"Not so bitter as you might suppose. He thinks well of your son."

The man's eyes flashed. "He is a fine lad; isn't he?"

"I was inclined to wish that he wasn't quite so fine when I first saw him; I was almost afraid he meant to tear me limb from limb," said I. "He seemed to resent my dropping down upon them from the clouds."

Oldroyd burst out laughing. "Well, you were a bit of a spoil-sport."

"And you'll leave matters to your son?" I asked.

"It's more his concern than mine. I didn't consult my father when I took my poor wife," he answered, looking down at his black clothes. "We choose for ourselves in Yorkshire. And will that boy have Constable Abbey some day?" he asked, with a sort of wonder.

"In a sense he will, I suppose. And, no doubt, your grandson will inherit it."

We had moved out of the recess by this time, and I was watching the room door. Doris came out and

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disappeared through the entrance to the staircase up which I had brought her.

Oldroyd followed her with his eyes. "She's a bonny lass," he muttered, "and better than she's bonny."

"Amen!" said I, remembering the scene with Crimp.

"You can't live near Constable and not know that," he added.

"She's gone to fetch your son. Come in to Ellers and have it over."

On our way to the room we ran across Trout and Butterfield, who had come out of court to examine some documents. They were told of what had happened, and bidden to instruct counsel that the case had been settled. I need not dwell on their amazement.

The meeting between plaintiff and defendant was a very stiff one on both sides, but Oldroyd went straight to the point.

"You can pull down the west wall at Monksmill, Mr. Ellers," said he, as soon as the bows had been exchanged. "The young folks can live there. I shall go back to t'old place. I'm best in Yorkshire." He was deeply moved, for all his brusqueness, and there was a touch of the West Riding in his speech.

Ellers flushed up to the roots of his hair. "It will be very hard on the young people if we can't be neighbourly," he said. "And if we can't, I'm sure

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the fault will be on my side. I'm sorry about the mill. If I'd known all I've learnt during the last few days, you wouldn't have had to bring me here. I'm very sorry."

They shook hands after that—shamefacedly on both sides.

"Hemingway and Jobson can settle the water difficulty in an afternoon," said I.

Just then the door opened and the lovers came in. I could not make my escape, for the plaintiff advanced to meet Doris, and the two blocked the door. He shook his fist at his son as the boy crossed him on his way to Ellers.

There had been a suspicion of Yorkshire roughness in Oldroyd's manner when he spoke to the father, but there was nothing but Yorkshire tenderness in his greeting to the girl.

"God bless thee, my lass!" he said, as he took her hands and bent down to kiss her; "we'll mak' thee happy, niver fear!"

I was able to get away after this. The moment that I stepped into the corridor I saw that the trial was over and that everything was known. Constable-Abbotts and Monksmill were pouring out of the court; a clattering, hand-shaking little mob, heading straight for the refreshment bar. There was peace on the countryside once more.

A few minutes later Oldroyd and Ellers and the young people had emerged from the room, and were

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making their way towards Carey Street. Doris had the old man's roses in her hand. Some one must have been keeping watch on behalf of the villagers, for a clumping and clattering of country shoe-leather sounded from the direction of the refreshment bar ; and the next moment Constable-Abbotts and Monks-mill appeared in view, all excitement to give the party a send-off. The good folk ducked and grinned, and shot out brief words of congratulation as they brushed past the four, and hurried to range themselves on each side of the entrance.

Policemen and orderlies were holding the doors wide open, and the objects of the demonstration were close upon the double line, when three figures, pressing forward in desperate haste, came in sight—Thrift, Goosey, and Crimp. Zachary was straining every nerve to be in time, but the old legs were inexorable. He was working his stick like one demented as he struggled forward upon the blacksmith's arm. The agony on all three countenances was unspeakable. Suddenly Crimp gave a desperate look ahead of him—all would be over before they could reach their goal. The giant rose to the occasion, and, pausing for an instant, he gathered Thrift under his arm like a bundle, and fairly ran with him ; Goosey lumbering along in the rear.

They were in plenty of time, however, for both teams of counsel, Orme only excepted, had come forward to offer their congratulations. Beaming and

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jocund were they, every one, and joyousest of all the five was our stuff-gownsman, "Siddlefin" of the lantern jaws. I was glad that Orme was absent.

There was a breathless silence in the two ranks as boy and girl passed between, with plaintiff and defendant in their wake; but no sooner had the party crossed the threshold than the lines broke up, and Constable-Abbots and Monksmill were pouring forward, cheering and waving their hats. Two hansoms were in waiting; and I caught my last glimpse of the young people as they got into one of them.

It was a mad scene in Carey Street as the cabs drove off. The country folk were surging all about, and in the thick of them stood Crimp; the gigantic Crimp, swaying and roaring, a very bull of Bashan! with Zachary held up like an old doll in his arms. Goosey was hanging on to the giant's skirts; seeing nothing, but waving his billycock, and cheering with all his might.

CHAPTER IX

It was on a Saturday that *Oldroyd v. Ellers* came to such an unexpected end. My work at Gray's Inn had fallen so seriously into arrear that I gave the afternoon to it, and I kept Tommy to help me. He, to his vast regret, had not been at the Courts when the end came.

Somewhere between five and six o'clock, he ran out into Holborn to register a letter; and while I was sitting alone there came a faint rap at the office door. Zachary Thrift was the visitor. I was amazed to see him, for I knew that the witnesses had been despatched home hours before.

My first sensation was one of mere surprise, but when I looked at him I was shocked. His old face was drawn and haggard, and he seemed in the last stage of exhaustion and decrepitude. So feeble was he that he swayed and staggered as he tried to mount the one stair which leads up to my room. When I had helped him over it, he sank into a chair, and he lay back, so shrivelled and inert, that he looked like a mere bundle of clothes.

"Whatever is the matter?" I asked, as soon as he had recovered himself a little.

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"I've been left behind."

"How did you find me out?"

"When I went back to the hotel, they was all gone. The tall gentleman—Mr. Kemp—he said as he could do nothing for me; I must come on to you. He was that short, he was," said Zachary, miserably.

I guessed from his manner that the manager had been very rough with him.

"Well, you're all right now," I said encouragingly. "We'll see after you."

"I thought belike, Master Tommy was here," said the old man, with a forlorn glance round the room. "No, no; he's out after the wummin," he added, with a sourness, that had a keen sense of disappointment behind it. "That's where *he* is."

"I thought belike, he was here," he repeated to himself. "I shan't never see 'un again. Just as well, maybe! I'm nowt in Lunnon, now the trial's over. They was pleasant enough afore, at the hotel—Mr. Kemp and all on 'em—all on 'em."

"And what's become of Mr. Goosey?"

The old man compressed his lips and was silent. "I did think as Goosey would ha' seen me through," he muttered.

By this time he had recovered enough, to sit up in his usual attitude, but the thought of Goosey's desertion seemed to open his wounds afresh. His muttered sentence was addressed to his stick. A

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desolate and deplorable old figure he looked, as he wagged his head over his crossed hands.

“What—UNKIE !”

There was no mistaking the welcome in Tommy’s voice. The poor old eyes brightened, and for a moment, something like a grin flickered on Zachary’s lips.

“Mr. Thrift has been left behind,” I said.

“Well, that’s good for us, as we’re seeing him again. But how did it happen, uncle ?”

Thrift was unwilling to answer; but he seemed to feel that an explanation of his plight and condition was inevitable.

“I took a drop to drink, and I fell asleep,” he said, very humbly. “We all had a drop to drink, and I lost ‘em. It was Goosey as I saw last, if I don’t mistake,” he went on.

“And where did you fall asleep ?”

“Down by the river, where you took us, Master Tommy.”

“The Embankment gardens. That was one of our smoking-places ; Lincoln’s Inn Fields was the other,” explained Tommy, for my benefit.

“Well, you’re all right, now you’ve had a nap,” he said to the old man.

“No, no ! I’m both sick and sorry, Master Tommy.”

“Not sick,” said the boy, cheerfully.

Zachary pondered for a moment. “Not now,” he

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answered grimly, with an uncomfortable smacking of his lips.

This was half humorous; and my laughter and Tommy's roars of appreciation did him good.

"And what did you do when you woke up?" was the next question.

"I went to the hotel, and they was all gone; they'd all forgot me—Goosey and all."

"And Kemp was none too sympathetic," said I. "He had the sense to send Mr. Thrift on here, but he might have sent him in a cab and somebody with him."

"I'll call on Monday and have a word with him," said Tommy.

But Zachary in his humiliation would not hear of that.

"No, no, Master Tommy; he didn't know no better. I don't bear no malice. Love your enemies: be kind to them as dispitefully uses you!"

"Your friends didn't forget you," said I. "They went off in two parties, and the second lot must have thought you had gone with the first. By-the-by, where's your luggage?"

"That's gone. Me and Goosey had one box atween us."

"Well, you know *he* could have meant nothing but kindness."

"Left-handed kindness, a-leavin' me in Lunnon without a mossel o' clo'es and no money," grunted

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Zachary, in quite his old manner. The rest had done much for him, and Tommy's presence and welcome had done more.

"No money!" I exclaimed.

"I had my pus stole. I felt for 'un the moment I woke up, and he was gone."

Zachary was once more dreadfully ashamed of himself.

"Was there much in it?"

"Seven and ninepence—seven and ninepence was in 'un after breakfast this mornin'," he groaned.

"But that was before—before the trial was over," said Tommy.

The old man seemed to find consolation in this reminder, as he thought it over with half-shut eyes.

"It's nothing but Providence as they didn't take my stick," he went on. "I must ha' kept a good tight hold o' he." He said this with a touch of pride as he patted the object in question.

The thought of a London pickpocket burdening himself with such a piece of timber was too much for Tommy. He burst out laughing.

Zachary received this as a tribute to his cleverness.

"I always do keep a good tight hold o' he, Master Tommy." And again he patted the stick.

"What you want is a cup of tea," said the boy, struck by a sudden thought. "You shall have it in half a jiff."

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As he moved about getting the tea-things, and operating upon them with an office duster, Zachary followed him with worshipping eyes.

"It's the wummin as learnt him his ways," he muttered, when Tommy was outside setting the kettle on to boil; "but they didn't learn him his lovin'-kindness. That's his nature."

"He's gone out," he ejaculated, when the outer door slammed.

"He's getting the milk."

Zachary drew in his breath with a hissing sound. "Gettin' the milk!" he repeated, in a sort of rapture. "Takin' all this trouble along of I! Bless his heart!"

"And him a lawyer!" he went on, staring hard at the books and papers littered about. "All of them inside of his head, and him so cunnin' about turnips—turnips and taters! It's won'erful—won'erful! And him a-runnin' out to get me milk!"

Zachary had a brush-up, and then he did full justice to the tea and to the biscuits which accompanied it. He took no interest in the kind with which I mortify the flesh at four o'clock; but a sweet variety, which Tommy hunted out of Peacock's private drawer, was very much to his taste.

"And what are you going to tell them at Constable?" asked Tommy.

Zachary was quite himself again by this time. "I've been a-thinkin' o' that, Master Tommy," he

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said, with a wave of the cigar which he had accepted out of my box—"I've been a-thinkin' of that."

"And what's the tale to be?"

The old man leered, and seemed to hug himself with delight.

"I shall tell 'un as you took me to Westminster Abbey, Master Tommy. That's what I shall tell 'un. Me and Goosey was there last Sunday."

"And I shall tell 'un as how I had tea here," he went on; grinning and chuckling at his own ingenuity. "They can't gainsay that. I shall tell 'un about your a-fetchin' the milk, and what the biscuits was like. That'll carry all off."

In the midst of our laughter, and the shrill triumphant chuckles of the old man, there came a knock at the door. Tommy disappeared to answer it. I caught a few hurried words outside; then there was a shuffling of heavy feet over the oilcloth, and the next moment, Goosey was standing in the doorway, devouring Thrift with his eyes—a panting, dilapidated Goosey, whose hat was dinted in, and whose face was ghastly pale, with beads of perspiration standing upon it.

"Oh, Mr. Thrift!" he cried, almost beside himself with joy.

Tommy put him into a chair, and, after a choke or two, the good soul turned his face to the wall and wept.

Zachary's jaw had dropped at the sight of Goosey. What about Westminster Abbey now? His lips

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chumped the cigar as he sat looking at his friend and thinking the matter over.

"Where ha' you a-come from, Goosey?" he croaked out a little uneasily, as soon as the other had wiped his eyes and was facing us once again.

"I come straight from the hotel, Mr. Thrift: I come as quick as ever I could," was the meek answer.

"Who was it you see there?"

"The young lady in the bar, Mr. Thrift."

"Did you see Mr. Kemp? Yes, or no, sir! No lies, Goosey!"

Zachary's tone was losing its uneasiness, and was becoming more dictatorial and severe every moment; and in it there was a suggestion of Orme's method of dealing with a recalcitrant witness.

"I didn't see no one but the young lady. Why should I want to tell you lies, Mr. Thrift?"

"Did she tell you as I'd been there? Speak out, Goosey!"

"That was how I knew as you was stopped behind, and was a-huntin' about for me. The young lady said you was upset. I run nearly all the way, Mr. Thrift; I did indeed! It wasn't because I knew as you was angered with me; I was afeared as you was goin' to have a stroke. I'm always expectin' it, but it 'ud break my heart if I was to give it you a day afore God Almighty."

Poor Goosey had to pause for a moment before he could go on.

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"And then, when I come on here, hardly expectin' to see you alive, there you was—a-sittin' that cheerful-like and smoking a cigyar. You've a wonderful strong head, Mr. Thrift."

Zachary had bunched up his lips at the mention of a stroke. Now, he blew out a long, slow, contemptuous stream of tobacco.

"It's gettin' drunk as brings on strokes, Goosey," he said, with intense meaning.

Goosey hung his head. "It's the first time in my life, Mr. Thrift," he murmured imploringly.

"You tell us all about it, Goosey." Thrift croaked this out as if he were calling on the other to make public his transgressions as a penance or act of expiation. "What did you do after me and you had had our dinner with Crimp and the others? Don't you try to keep nothing back, Goosey!"

"It was after we'd had our dinner, Mr. Thrift, as you said we'd slip off by ourselves. That's true, ain't it? And when we was a-crossin' the road, you said 'Goosey, we'll have a merry-go-down to finish off with.' You was in wonderful spirits, Mr. Thrift; you remember how you was a-singin'!"

"I was a-singin' Master Tommy's song," said Thrift, with a cock of his eye, to make us understand that this was a mere shot.

"Well, Mr. Thrift, I *thowt* it was 'The Miller o' the Dee.' I seem to hear you now, a-singin' as you didn't care for nobody. But I ain't a-goin' to set

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up my memory afore yourn. And I thowt you was a-singin' it again outside the public-house, after we'd had the drop o' gin. And then I forgot all about you, Mr. Thrift. I don't even remember bein' with you, after you was a-singin' outside the Seven Stars. I was that overcome with liquor, I didn't notice nothing, and I didn't think of nothing, except as I wanted to sit down somewhere—me as promised your missis to look after you."

Goosey fairly broke down again when he recalled this broken promise.

"That was afore two o'clock, Goosey," said Zachary, who had followed with intense interest his friend's recital of their joint proceedings.

"I know it was, Mr. Thrift, but when we got into the big place with the railings round it, I must ha' fell asleep. It wasn't fair to go away and leave me—it wasn't *kind*, Mr. Thrift."

"Was I a-goin' to stay along of a man as was snorin' back on a seat, with his hat drove in?" said Thrift, indignantly. "It warn't respectable, Goosey."

Goosey looked at his hat, and blushed as he knocked it out.

"You might ha' woke me, Mr. Thrift," he said mildly.

"And there you was, a-snорin' on a seat, hower after hower, while I was in Westminster Abbey along o' Master Tommy."

Zachary spoke as if the contrast was too degrading

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for contemplation. Goosey was keenly alive to the ignominy of his own side of it.

"And while you was a-sleepin' like a hog, I'll be bound you had your pus stole," was the patriarch's next remark, with another cock of his eye towards Tommy and me.

Goosey made a wild dive into his pocket. "No, Mr. Thrift, my pus is all right," he said thankfully. "It's here—and lawk-a-mercy, I've got yourn too!"

He had fished out two purses and was gazing upon them spellbound.

Zachary's astonishment at the sight of his lost treasure was too great to be concealed. Goosey, however, saw nothing of this, and the next moment Thrift was himself again.

"And you not to remember me a-handin' it over to you in the Seven Stars. You must ha' been dead drunk, Goosey!"

"He must have a cup of tea," cried Tommy. "There's plenty of milk left."

Goosey accepted the offer with thankfulness. Unlike Zachary, he seemed to prefer the plainer biscuits.

"And what am I a-goin' to say when I get home?" he moaned, when the meal was over and he had lit his pipe.

Thrift looked at him long and musingly. "You've made a beast o' yourself this afternoon, Goosey," he said, at length, "but the circumstances was some

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excuse. It was Miss Doris's health as you was a-drinkin'. I'll stand by you, Goosey, this once. I'll tell 'un as you was at Westminster Abbey, along o' me and Master Tommy."

Goosey in his gratitude for this magnanimity nearly broke down once more.

"I'll never do it again, Mr. Thrift, as long as I live," he said, with tears in his eyes. "It's dreadful to think as it ain't true, but I couldn't never face your missis if she was to know."

"You mustn't rub this in any more, Mr. Thrift," I said, when Goosey had retired to perform his ablutions. "I have a very great respect for your friend."

"I aren't a-goin' to ; I might burn my fingers if I warn't careful," he answered, chuckling and rocking himself to and fro over his stick at the thought of his successful villainy. "I shan't talk nowt about 'un, and I shan't let Goosey talk nowt, neither."

"I've been thinkin' about that Mr. Kemp," he broke out viciously, after a spell of rumination. "I've two minds to go back and break my stick over 'un."

"No, no!" I answered; "it isn't worth while losing your train on his account."

"Good-bye," I said on the landing, when the pair were about to start under Tommy's guidance. "No more healths to Miss Doris at Waterloo!"

Poor Goosey protested that he should never drink a health again.

"No, no; Mr. Goosey will never do it again,"

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said Tommy; but it was Thrift whom he patted on the shoulder. "It won't happen again, will it, uncle?" he asked meaningfully.

Thrift leered. "Not till the weddin' feast, Master Tommy; and then ——" Here he crossed his hands over his stick and broke out into a quaver—

"Let the to-ast pa-a-a-s!
Drink to the la-a-a-s!
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the gla-a-a-s!"

"Oh no! I won't say that," said the repentant Goosey; "—but it's a pretty song, Mr. Thrift."

THE CALAMITY OF CHARLES HARTRIGG

CHAPTER I

CHARLES HARTRIGG's father and I had been close friends as schoolfellows. But when he went to Oxford, and I entered into training as a solicitor, our ways parted and the cleavage was never made good. After a year or two of indecision, he followed up his degree by reading for the bar, but by that time I was a qualified solicitor, and was earning my bread as a conveyancing clerk in a country office. Later on, when I had purchased my half-share of poor old Puseley's decaying business in Gray's Inn, and had come back to London, I found John Hartrigg's name in the counsel part of the law list, but I never met him ; and before I had got firm in the saddle of my new venture, and was in a position to be of some use to a member of the bar, I learnt from some source or another that my schoolfellow had married and had settled down, to live in the country on the moderate competence that had always

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been his own. Puseley had been so long dead that I had almost forgotten his manifold deficiencies, when one morning John Hartrigg was shown into my room, and we stood face to face after an interval of nearly thirty years.

We greeted one another in such wise as was natural under the circumstances. We shook hands, and each having seated himself, took stock of the other's past as recorded in his face.

"Very grey, very tired—almost blighted, in fact," was my mental summary of John Hartrigg's aspect, as I made a conventional remark upon the flight of time.

"I want you to make my will," he said.

I took a sheet of draft paper out of the drawer at my side, and sat pen in hand awaiting his instructions.

He paused for a moment as if about to begin; and then, perhaps, it struck him that some explanation was due to me.

"I received my death sentence a fortnight ago. All the doctors—there were three of them—said I could not live another year. Heart trouble, they call it. I thought I couldn't do better than come to you. I had heard of your progress from time to time; and, to tell the truth, as soon as I found that the end was in sight, my thoughts went back a good deal to those early days."

He said this with a touch of feeling, but before I

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could say anything, he went on in the calm, almost monotonous voice in which he had opened.

"It sounds very terrible, and I'm sorry to have to trouble you with it, but, so far as I'm concerned, there's no ground for unhappiness. I wouldn't have it otherwise if I could."

As I struggled to collect my thoughts, I could hear the clock ticking on the mantelpiece, and the room with all its contents was present to my eye, but my brain was groping among the shadows of the past; for, interposed between my physical vision and the objects before it, and seeming to pervade the whole room, was a young face brimming over with life and arch with mischief, under the peak of a blue cricket-cap. There it floated, clear and distinct as when it had bitten itself into my memory on some forgotten occasion long years before; and with a feeling not far removed from tears, I was conscious that the happy imp and the grey, tired man seated opposite me were one and the same person.

"I am grieved to distress you so; and really there's nothing to grieve about." The level voice brought me back to myself, and I looked at him wonderingly.

"The truth is, my wife died last year."

I think he saw that I understood him; but after a moment's silence he spoke again.

"I dare say you remember the old epitaph;

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it's been running in my head night and day ever since—

“ ‘She first deceased : he for a little tried
To live without her ; liked it not and died.’ ”

“ Liked it not,” he repeated, with a faint accent of admiration. “ There’s such a fine restraint about that way of putting it ! ” There was no air of confession in his manner ; nothing to suggest that the subject referred to lay near his heart, or was anything but dry commonplace fact.

“ Let’s get done with the will-making,” said I.

“ I’ve got a great favour to ask you first ; I want you to act as guardian to my son. Please hear me out before you say no.”

I made some movement of acquiescence, and he went on to explain that the boy was eighteen and was already entered at one of the colleges at Oxford, whither he would proceed in a month or so. Under the circumstances, the guardianship could not prove onerous, and in all probability my duties would amount to little or nothing more than furnishing the ward with an allowance, and the giving him advice as to his future career.

“ Charlie is to have everything on his coming of age, and the whole trust will end then. I want you to be my sole trustee and executor, as well as his guardian. Now you have all the facts.”

“ There’s one word more,” he continued. “ I don’t want to press you unduly ; but in fairness to

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myself, I must say that if you refuse, there is no one else to whom I can confide the trust with a clear mind. I have had a fortnight to think the matter over, and I've thought of nothing else ; and that is the conclusion I have come to. I may not have time——”

He stopped abruptly, but it was not difficult to follow the broken sentence to its end. If I refused, he might not have time to find anybody else. I could not but respect his unwillingness to say a word more than was necessary to justify his coming to me on such an errand after so many years.

“I am willing to act,” I said, taking up my pen. “What are your wishes in the event of your son not attaining twenty-one ? ”

The gift over proved to be such a simple one that I was able to draw the will then and there. In the course of a few minutes I handed it to him for perusal.

“ You are determined to give me no co-trustee ? ” I said, when he handed it back, after having insisted upon the introduction of a full remuneration clause.

“ Quite. It's not necessary ; the risk of your dying within the next three years is too small to be worth considering.”

“ It's a bad plan to give any man absolute control over another's estate.”

“ I'm quite easy on that score,” he answered, with

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the ghost of a smile; "and I've better reasons than you know of. I've heard a good deal of you from time to time. And what would you think of me if I asked a layman to act with you?"

"It's so usual, I don't suppose I should have given it a thought."

"But it can't be right to ask any one to accept responsibility under such conditions. It's responsibility without control. How can a layman exercise supervision if his co-trustee is a solicitor?"

I made no answer. I was struck by his practical common sense and by the right feeling behind it, and I was thinking that perhaps I was the poorer for having lost sight of John Hartrigg. The tired wreck, who had come back to me after so many years, had not always moved among his fellows as a shadow among shadows.

"What is your son like?" I asked.

"I think he is everything that a boy should be," he answered after a pause; "I can see no fault in him, unless it be a certain aloofness as regards other boys."

I engrossed the will with my own hand, and it was duly executed and attested.

"Perhaps one of these gentlemen will be so good as to tell my attendant that I shall be glad of his arm," said the testator, as soon as the two clerks had signed their names. "He is in the cab outside."

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"No, no, I won't trouble *you*," he said, anticipating the offer that was on my lips. "Please let me go as I came, but don't fancy I'm not grateful."

We shook hands without another word, and he passed slowly out through the open door, and shut it behind him. A fortnight later I received a letter telling me that he was dead.

CHAPTER II

IT was not feasible for me to journey to Denbighshire to arrange for the funeral and put matters in train for proving the will. Old Peacock went as my substitute. He departed clad in shining sables, and showing in every curve of his ample person, the undertakerish air of melancholy, which it is his custom to assume on such occasions. Five or six days later he returned to Gray's Inn, clothed in his usual habiliments and restored to his wonted cheerfulness. Young Mr. Hartrigg was good looking, but somewhat stand-offish, and he proposed to come to London without delay. This was all that Peacock could tell me about my ward.

I lost no time in going into the particulars of the estate, which my factotum had brought back with him. In addition to the small freehold on which my testator had resided, there were investments, which, in round figures, produced an income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and there was the sum of a thousand pounds on deposit at a bank. This last sum had been set aside to provide for the university expenses. My ward's heritage, after payment of

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debts and funeral and testamentary expenses, represented an income of rather more than three hundred a year. There was a sum of a thousand pounds due from a debtor in one of the South American republics, which I did not take into account. It seemed clear from certain correspondence, that had taken place between the debtor and John Hartrigg, that the money was irrecoverable.

It was only a few days after Peacock's return that Charles Hartrigg presented himself at my office. Slightly under middle height, he was trim and compact in build, with dark eyes and hair. There was no shyness in his demeanour. As soon as we had shaken hands, and the few colourless words of sympathy, which the situation demanded, had been uttered and acknowledged, he intimated that he was aware of all the circumstances under which I had accepted the guardianship, and was most anxious to make the responsibility which I had taken upon myself as little troublesome as possible. But there was no cordiality in his manner, and the grave chilly politeness of his little set speech warned me that my charge required careful handling, and that I must proceed with discretion if I wished to obtain any influence over him. I half suspected that he had been giving me a reminder that his father had not intended to impose upon me the onerous duties of an ordinary guardianship.

Nevertheless, my heart warmed towards the boy ; for though the young face was full of reserve, there

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was much in it to remind one of the imp in the blue cricket cap ; and, striving to read it as we talked on matters of no importance, I made up my mind that if I failed to win his confidence, the blame should rest on his side, and not on mine. After all, there was nothing unpromising in his behaviour ; the position was a trying one for a boy of eighteen, and it was natural enough that he should be on his dignity a little at our first meeting.

I thought it good tactics to lay before him full particulars of the trust estate, before touching on any matters connected with the guardianship. Long experience in my profession had taught me that a solicitor could best win the confidence of clients, inclined to be suspicious, if he encouraged them to probe matters to the bottom, and took care that his explanations should be elaborate in character though terse in form, and that his performance should always be a little better than his promise. The first two of these rules I put in practice that day, and I determined that time should give my ward assurance of the third.

When he had thawed a little under the spell of my diplomacy, I approached the more delicate ground of my guardianship obligations, and here, I think, I advanced myself in his good graces by asking him what he considered the amount of his allowance ought to be. At the same time I made it clear that it would be my duty to carefully consider any figures that he might put forward ; as though I was anxious

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to meet his wishes, which I felt sure would be reasonable, I was bound to consider the rights of those who would take the estate in the highly improbable event of his dying under twenty-one. When matters had reached this stage I brought the interview to an end. It was not necessary for me to make any arrangements for his immediate welfare. I had learned from Peacock that he was to go up to Oxford in the course of two or three weeks and that, in the mean time, he was to stay with a schoolfellow, at whose home near the Crystal Palace, he had more than once been a visitor during the past few years.

"I think we shall hit it off all right together," said I, at parting.

"I'm sure you won't be the one to blame if we don't," was his answer, and in his handshake and his voice there was an increase of cordiality beyond my expectation.

When, two or three days later, Charles Hartrigg submitted to me the figures of his proposed allowance, the amount was so moderate that I was able to at once agree to it. He dined with me at the club that evening, and though I had looked forward to this as something of an ordeal, I found the time slip by most agreeably. The boy treated me with a respect that was almost punctilious, but his manners were easy and unembarrassed, and his talk betrayed an intelligence ripe beyond his years and free from any taint of prigishness.

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A little later, however, I was not quite so well pleased. We left the club early, and I took him to my sister's, where I knew that his orphaned condition would assure him of a welcome. At first all went swimmingly. Host and hostess were charmed with him, and it seemed to me that my niece Elsie found him interesting. It is not easy to fathom the watchful silence of demure fifteen, but there was an unmistakable friendliness in her eyes when they rested on him. It was not until my nephews had made their appearing that the jarring note was struck. Within ten minutes of their entrance, I became vaguely conscious that they were not getting on with the visitor. Observing this, and remembering that his father had referred to his "aloofness," I was perhaps over-ready to find offence in him; but though I strove to clear my mind of all prejudice, the impression that he was treating Hal and Philip with an air of patronage and superiority grew upon me, and as the evening wore on this settled into a conviction. I felt a sense of relief when, on the plea that he had a long way to go, he made an early departure.

My nephews sat ominously silent while the rest of the family sang his praises, but when, later on, I smoked a pipe in their den upstairs, they pronounced their verdict in good set terms. Much of their talk with him had been almost unintelligible to me; but from what I had then caught, and from what they said after he had gone, I gathered that though

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he had professed to despise all manly exercises, he was fond of rowing, and had won some school distinction as an oar. My nephews complained that even in regard to rowing, his attitude had been painfully superior; he had gone in for it, he said, because you must take exercise in some form.

In due time the boy went up to Oxford, and the course of things was such that the duties of my guardianship made no difference in the even tenor of my life. There were occasional letters to and from the ward, and now and again, there was some little correspondence with his tutor, but nothing that did not work in with the ordinary routine of my business. The lad spent part of each vacation with his friends at Sydenham: and there and in Gray's Inn, and at the houses of my sister and of two or three of my friends, to whom I had introduced him, we met one another. But these meetings were not frequent, for his visits to Sydenham rarely extended beyond a week or ten days. The rest of the vacations was spent with some cousins on his father's side, an old couple living on a small estate in North Wales, whose guest he had been from time to time, ever since his early boyhood. So far as he knew, he had no other relatives in the country. When he told me that his mother's family was settled in South America, the existence of that bad debt of a thousand pounds was soon explained. The debtor was, in fact, one of his maternal uncles.

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I liked my ward, and there was never any friction in the relations between us, but though his conduct was in all respects irreproachable, and I was always glad to see him, I was conscious that my feeling towards him did not deepen into affection. I had no reason to suppose that his feeling towards me was any warmer in its character, but I was gratified when, at the end of his first term, he asked me to visit him at Oxford ; and when, six months later, the invitation was for the second time renewed, I accepted it, and promised to give him a few days at the end of the next Long Vacation.

CHAPTER III

How well I remember the incidents of that short visit to Oxford, and the foolish longing it awoke in me to have my youth again and reshape my career ! I smile when I recall to memory the sentimental condition in which I journeyed back to London ; but I am not at all ashamed of it. What man of ripe age, who has never been to college, can see Oxford for the first time, and watch the young life with which it throbs, without feeling that he has missed something that can never be made good ?

On the night of my arrival it was arranged between my ward and me as we sat over the fire, that I should be left to my own devices during the daytime. I did not want to interfere with his studies, and just then there was a special demand upon his time outside them ; for he was in training for some rowing event—“college-fours,” I think he called it.

Armed with a guide-book, I saw Oxford in my own way. It was to a rustle of dead leaves that I sauntered in gardens and quadrangles, but the sun was hot and there was no touch of winter. Here

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and there one might have thought that spring had come again. Tree and shrub wore the young green of April, and over all there was blue sky, with an ethereal mildness in the air. It is something to have seen Oxford under such conditions ; and I give thanks for those sweet days, when "chill October" belied her name, and wooed me with the graces of the springtime.

So the days of my visit slipped away. My ward and I foregathered at lunchtime, and afterwards I bore him company as far as the river. When twilight came on I sought refuge in the Union and read the papers. Dinner in hall followed. There I sat among the boys, and we drank beer out of quaint silver flagons, which had somehow escaped the melting-pot during the Great Rebellion, and I ate with thankfulness the rations, which the young sinners about me never spoke of without a grumble. In my ward's panelled sitting-room, he and I smoked and chatted till it was time for me to retire to the bedroom, which the courtesy of the dean had placed at the guest's disposal, and where I was ministered unto by "Gentleman George," his reverence's own henchman.

"I hope I'm not keeping your friends away," I remarked to my host one evening. It had just occurred to me that though I had been with him for three days, no visitor had presented himself.

"You'd like to see something of the men," he answered, after a slight pause.

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"I've seen something of them in hall and in the streets, but I've a very shadowy notion of what they're like."

"Let's have some of them to breakfast to-morrow. I shall be back in half a shake."

He was moving to the door as he said this, and in less than ten minutes he was back again.

"Got your men?" I asked.

"Oh yes, and seen to the food too."

"Hospitality moves on oiled wheels in Oxford," thought I.

I look back upon that college breakfast as one of the most trying events of my social career. I overslept myself a little, and when I reached my ward's sitting-room, I found the hearth full of dishes, and five or six red-cheeked young barbarians standing round it, discussing athletics. I learned that morning what an old fossil I had become. Sports and pastimes had played a pretty large part in my school life, but the boys of my generation did not live, and move, and have their being in them, to the exclusion of all other interests. With these lads, however, if one might judge them by their talk, athletics were the be-all, and end-all, of existence. The ceremony of introduction, and certain polite inquiries whether I had seen this, that, or the other guide-book wonder, which followed upon it, checked the stream for a few minutes; but no sooner had the party settled down to the viands than the

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dammed-up waters burst forth and carried all before them.

My ward made no sign that the talk was in any way strange or trying, and he bore his full share in it. In mercy to me, he made two or three attempts to divert it into another channel, but his efforts and such poor seconding, as I could offer, came to nothing ; and I was fain at last to consume my breakfast in silence, and with a vague sense that perhaps at my age I ought to be thankful that I could still take an interest in food and drink. Pegging away in this forlorn condition, I happened to lift my eyes to Charles Hartrigg's face, and I found that he was looking at me with a smile hovering about the corners of his mouth. I strove to carry matters off with a good grace by responding with a wink, but there was a sense of injury rankling in my bosom ; for the expression of his face when I caught him unawares, and the blush that followed, made me feel suspicious. Was he enjoying the success of a practical joke at my expense ?

"I'm afraid we've bored you awfully," he said, with an air of apology, as soon as the last guest had departed.

It was my turn to smile now.

"Some of them are 'freshers,'" he went on, a little awkwardly ; "the men here aren't all like that."

I did not make any answer, for I was busy

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examining the bookshelves. Rain was falling, and I wanted something substantial to read. I decided at last upon Matthew Arnold's poems ; it seemed such a capital opportunity of renewing one's acquaintance with *Thyrsis* and the *Scholar Gipsy*. I did not leave the bookcase, however. The more I examined my ward's books, the more I was struck by their number and quality ; so I continued to potter about among them while he read the newspaper at the fireside. In returning a volume to its place on one of the lower shelves, I happened to espy a book that had fallen behind the row. This proved to be a small quarto, squat and black, bound in faded leather and tied with leathern thongs like bootlaces.

"Hulloa ! What's this ?" said I, as I rose from my knees and began to study the title-page. It was in Latin, and the imprint was Amsterdam, with a date near the end of the fifteenth century. My latinity is nothing to boast of, but it proved sufficient to give me a general notion of the book's contents. It was a black-letter treatise upon the occult sciences of the Middle Ages.

"On magic, apparently," said I, a little later. I spoke more loudly, as my ward had made no response to my first ejaculation, and I had taken it for granted he was engrossed in his newspaper. But on looking towards him as I spoke, I found that he had turned round in his chair and was watching me.

"What's this part about?" I asked, when he

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had crossed the room and was looking down at the page from over my shoulder.

He took the book and pored over the crabbed Latin.

"So far as I can make out, its something about the dematerialization of the spirit," he said, at length.

"What's that?"

"Those old chaps seem to have thought that the soul could be made to separate itself from the body and wander about at its own sweet will."

"Do you take an interest in such rubbish?" I asked, with a smile of contempt.

"I think it's rather interesting," he answered. "I picked this up at a bookstall here; I mean to plod through it some day."

Nothing more was said; though when I resumed my investigation of the bookcase, I came upon two or three modern books, or reprints, dealing with occult subjects. "I suppose it's the fashion here now, to play with these mysteries, instead of blue china and peacocks' feathers," thought I, as I settled down to the ever-delightful *Thyrsis*. Before dusk that afternoon I had paid the two Hinkseys the tribute of a pilgrimage.

In the course of our long evening gossips, Charles Hartrigg announced his desire to read for the bar. I, of course, had no objection to offer. His father had been a barrister; he was himself, I felt sure, endowed with the necessary stock of brains, and, what

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was almost as important, he had means adequate to support him as a gentleman during the ten years or thereabouts, which, except in special cases, must elapse before a barrister has learnt his business and is competent to assume its responsibilities. I thought it well to let him know that he must reach that stage of his development before he could expect much help from me.

But though I discussed his proposal without enthusiasm, I inwardly rejoiced over it; for our evening talks had satisfied me that he had natural gifts for the calling which he had chosen. No solicitor of my age and standing can have failed to hive in his memory a store of professional recollections, but if he be a wise man, he will be very chary of drawing upon it in the society of the uninitiated. I am as careful on this point as most men, but on the night of my arrival I fell most grievously. Tempted by some remark which my ward had made upon the day's news, I found myself involved in the recital of a long and rather technical story of malpractices on the Stock Exchange; and to my surprise he followed it with marked interest, and showed by his questions that he was anxious to have every point made clear to him. Encouraged by this, I did not shrink, as and when occasion arose, to draw upon my budget of strange cases, and I was often astonished at his eagerness to fully understand all the details, and his nice appreciation of anything that savoured of

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diplomacy. What particularly struck me was his interest in the motives that had swayed the personages of my stories, and the relish with which he hailed any touch of character.

When I recall those evenings, the old college room with its green panelling and dim lamplight rises before me, and I see my ward's neat figure and listening face; as with his eyes fixed on mine, he lies back in his chair, one leg thrown over the other, and both hands on his knee, grasping his pipe.

CHAPTER IV

Not long after my visit to Oxford, Charles Hartrigg was entered as a student of his father's Inn, the Middle Temple. On his periodical visits to town to eat his dinners, he always paid his duty to me in Gray's Inn, and I do not think he ever missed spending at least one evening at my sister's. By this time Hal and Philip were earning their bread in distant parts of the empire, and Elsie's schooldays were over. My ward had become such a friend of the house, that his twenty-first birthday was celebrated by a little festival held under its roof. Accounts between us were soon adjusted, but the termination of my guardianship made no difference in our social relations.

In due cause Charles Hartrigg took his degree. He had told me a few months before that he had no intention of reading for honours. I was a little surprised; but it was too late to alter his determination; so I acquiesced in it, almost without comment. In the last letter which I received from his tutor, that worthy man spoke of my ward's conduct as exemplary, but expressed regret that he had not

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attempted to distinguish himself in the schools. The letter also said, what a pity it was that he had not taken fuller advantage of the opportunity which a university career offers, of laying the foundation of valuable and lasting friendships. "He will carry that aloofness to his grave," thought I, as I read this. I had come to the conclusion long before, that the guests at the breakfast-party had been mere boating acquaintances, whom he had called together on the spur of the moment.

On leaving Oxford, he established himself in a comfortable set of furnished rooms in Bedford Place, and entered the chambers of Mr. Trevor Hampson, an eminent member of the junior bar, whom I had recommended. Before this arrangement was made, I had offered the student a seat in my office for a few months, in order that he might gain a practical knowledge of legal routine. Rather to my relief, this offer was, after consideration, declined.

It was some eight or nine months after Charles Hartrigg had left Oxford, that one afternoon he paid me an unexpected visit. It was the last day of the old year. My clerks had all gone, and I was in no hurry to make a move to my living-rooms in Verulam Buildings. When I heard his knock, I was sitting at a lonely hearth, meditating somewhat ruefully on things in general and the past twelve months in particular. As soon as I had let him in, I felt sure that he had some good news to communicate. Never

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had I seen his face so animated, and never had his greeting been so demonstrative.

"Elsie has promised to marry me," he said, his hand still in mine.

I was not surprised; no one who had had my opportunities of seeing her and the lad together during the last few months, could have felt much doubt as to how matters stood between them. I had dropped a hint to my sister on the subject, but only to find that she was eager for the match. After this, my niece was much in my thoughts, and in the end I came to the unsatisfactory conclusion, that, though I scarcely knew why, I was sorry she had not given her heart to some one else. But I kept my reflections to myself; and I do not think that there was anything lacking in the congratulations with which I received Charles Hartrigg's announcement of the betrothal.

"We're not to be married for two years," he said, as soon as he had established himself on the opposite side of the fireplace. "I shall be nearly twenty-five then, and Elsie will be over twenty."

I was well pleased to sit and listen to his rhapsodies on his lady-love. Elsie is very dear to me, and my heart warmed towards her lover as he sang her praises. He looked a mere boy as he sat there, with a flush on his face and his eyes bright with happiness. I am no advocate of very young marriages, but as I watched him and my thoughts

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played about his talk there was no disapproval in my mind. There was only that mixed feeling, half envy and half pity, with which a man of my years looks upon the exuberant joyfulness of the young.

" You'll be called in about another year, won't you ? " I asked, when he came to a pause in his recital of my niece's perfections.

" Yes ; and Hampson gave me a hint yesterday, that if I cared to stay on with him after my twelve months was up, he thought it could be arranged. It will be a fine thing if I can stick to his chambers. He'll be taking silk some day, and that'll let loose a lot of work. I ought to get enough of it to start me."

I had reason to know that Mr. Hampson was pleased with his pupil ; but the wish to keep him after the term of pupilage had expired, was an unexpected piece of good fortune. It spoke volumes for the lad's industry and capability. Truly, the dying year seemed to be heaping gifts upon him with both hands.

" How like the old shop this place is," said the lover, as he looked round my room.

By this time I had produced a box of cigars from its hiding-place, and we were both smoking. It is not often that any eye but my own beholds that solace of my official hours. There was a pair of candles above us on the mantelpiece ; but my room is spacious and lofty, and the further end was in shadow. As I watched the firelight playing

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upon cornice and panelling, and I recalled his quarters at Oxford, I agreed that they were very like my sanctum.

"By-the-by, did you ever read that old Latin book?"

This was a mere casual question suggested by his last remark; but it seemed to make him uncomfortable. He gave a slight start, and he paused before he answered me.

"Yes! Oh yes; I read it." He spoke indifferently, but I noticed that he was scanning me with half-shut eyes, and that his lips had tightened. I fancied there was suspicion in his fixed gaze.

"There's something fascinating in that old notion of the soul getting loose from the body. I thought of it several times after I left Oxford."

I said this to let him understand that I had no intention of making game of him. The fact was, I had remembered the book late one night as I sat before the fire half asleep; and as I thought over what he had told me about the theory of the old magicians, the possibilities that it opened up were so startling and bewildering, that all my drowsiness vanished, and when at length I went to bed, I lay awake with my mind full of them.

He said nothing, but there was no longer any suspicion in his eyes. We smoked in silence for awhile.

"The fabric of society would fall to pieces if men

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could let loose their souls," said I, giving expression to the train of thought that was passing through my mind. "Just think what would happen! The old theory of demoniac possession was wild enough, but if a man could enter into another man's being, he could control that being and——"

"They never pretended to do that," interrupted my listener.

"What did they pretend to do?"

"The spirit is, of course, invisible——" he began hesitatingly.

"Oh!" said I, taking advantage of the pause. "I think I understand now. The spirit would be invisible, but in all other respects it would be what the body was. Is that it?"

"It would be intangible as well as invisible, and I suppose material barriers would offer it no resistance."

"In other words, it could enter people's houses and outrage the privacy of men and women. Not a very dignified occupation for the soul!"

"Think of the power it would give! You could know all that people said and did, from the queen downwards." There was a glitter in the lad's eyes as he said this.

"Oh yes! The very thing for a blackmailer or a gambler on the Stock Exchange. But that would be sheer blackguardism."

"I never thought of that. Yes; there is that to be said against it."

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"That and a few other things," I answered, laughing; "but society would avenge itself in the long run. If any man had that gift and was despicable enough to practise it, it would bring its own punishment. It stands to reason he'd lose all touch with his fellows. He'd be on a different plane altogether; he'd be a monster. He'd soon be glad to cut his throat and have done with everything."

Charles Hartrigg did not join in my merriment. There was a brooding look on his face as he stared absently into the shadows, where the gleams of fire-light were still dancing.

"You think it might come to that?" he said at length.

"I'm certain of it."

"Nothing could make up for that—nothing."

I felt sure that he had been weighing the mythical gift against Elsie, and all the promise of the future, and I smiled at his earnestness.

"And, after all, we've got to find out the secret first," he added gaily. "It isn't as if we were put to our election."

I laughed at this legal phrase as I made my way to answer a modest knock from the landing without. It was the Inn lamplighter applying for his Christmas-box. When the man had departed, after censing me with his New Year wishes, I found my visitor ready to take his leave, and a minute later he had hurried off to keep tryst with his betrothed.

CHAPTER V

THE new year wore on, and to my eyes everything seemed rose-coloured with Elsie and her lover. But when, after a two months' holiday abroad, I paid my sister one of my usual evening visits, I had not been in the house for more than five minutes when I began to see that something was amiss. My opening inquiries after the young people were received by the parent birds with such an air of constraint, that when, a moment later, Elsie appeared, looking worn and pale, I thought it better to burst into a recital of my holiday adventures, and steer clear of Charles Hartrigg and all subjects likely to bring up his name.

"Anything wrong?" I whispered to my sister, as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

"We're afraid so; but we don't know. We've seen next to nothing of him for the last fortnight. For weeks before that he was here very little."

"You haven't spoken to Elsie?"

"She knows how uneasy we are. She won't say anything till she's made up her mind. That's Elsie's way."

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"Good-bye, little mouse," said I, as I held my niece's hand at the street door. "It's a long time since you and I floated our powerful minds together. The Gray's Inn tea-pot still keeps up its reputation."

That afternoon brewage of mine had often been a subject of jest between us, and more than once Elsie had honoured my quarters to partake of it.

"Can't I be of any use?" I asked, in answer to her wan little smile of acknowledgment. I looked at her as I spoke, and I thought it better to make a rapid exit without waiting for an answer.

"A bad business—damn him!" said I, as I slammed the door behind me. In imagination I saw my niece flying upstairs to find relief in a burst of crying, and my wrath was boiling.

I was not long kept in doubt as to the state of affairs. Next day Elsie made her appearance in Gray's Inn, and I knew what had happened as soon as I looked into her face. It was pale and drawn, and the brown eyes, that I had been wont to think the brightest and joyfullest things in my world, were lustreless and heavy. But they and the firm lips spoke of resolution and a settled purpose. Elsie had made up her mind.

"All over, Elsie?"

"All over, Uncle Chris."

Her tone was so unfaltering that I ventured to look again into her face. It made my heart ache;

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but I felt sure that now the blow had fallen, it had come as a relief. The torture of uncertainty was done with at last.

"I've told mother," she went on ; "and I thought I should like to tell you, myself."

"Thank you, my dear."

"You'll go away for a time, won't you ?" I said, after a pause.

"Yes; I shall go to the Morisons in Paris. Nancy has a studio there; I shall share that with her. Mrs. Morison will look after us both."

"I suppose I'd better ask some questions, and get it all over. Did you break off the engagement ?"

"I offered to. I got this letter this morning."

I took the letter and read it through three times. It was addressed from Clifford's Inn, and its opening was conventional. There was the usual gratitude for the other's frankness, the usual regret that a fuller knowledge had taught them their unfitness for one another, and the usual acknowledgment that all the fault was on one side. So far, the letter was common-form to a legal eye; but there were a few sentences near the end, which rang differently. In them the writer seemed to express a genuine grief that there must be a parting, and a genuine remorse that he should be the one to blame, and a full consciousness that he had thrown away his only chance of happiness. My anger and contempt were softened by a touch of pity as I sat pondering; for besides

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these sentences there was a postscript—"Ask your uncle to judge me as leniently as he can. I know what a bad return I have made."

"I suppose this really is the end," I said, as I handed back the letter. "You know best."

"I don't think he's quite responsible for what he does," was the answer.

"Has it been going on for long?"

"Nearly four months. It began by his not keeping appointments, and after he left Bedford Place, it got worse and worse. It was unbearable. He wasn't like himself; I can't explain what he was like, I can't make you understand—"

"We won't talk about it," I said hastily; for there was a piteous fluttering about the girl's hands, which was more than I could bear.

"I won't break down, Uncle Chris. I want you to know that I haven't been exacting or unreasonable. I felt sure, soon after you went away, that he was taking some drug."

I looked at her with a start. Was this the explanation?

"But it wasn't that," she went on in answer to my look. "I let him know what I thought, and he vowed I was mistaken. And I think I was. It's dreadful to say it, but I think he's mad. And I want to ask you one thing—you won't turn your back on him if he wants help, will you? I shall never see him again, and I won't ask you any

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questions ; but, dear Uncle Chris, I do want to be able to think that he isn't quite alone in the world."

The poor little hands were all a-flutter once again ; and when I held them in my own and gave the promise, Elsie's tears broke forth. We took a turn in the gardens as soon as she had recovered herself. Up and down, under the yellowing plane trees of the middle alley, we paced for half an hour without a word, and I think that the old world peacefulness of the surroundings comforted her a little.

"Beastly rat hole, this !" I said to myself, as, later in the day, I twisted my way up the winding-stair that led to the attics in Clifford's Inn, from which Charles Hartrigg had addressed his letter. I had thought matters out, and had come to the conclusion that the sooner I could see him the better. "Get it over and done with," is my maxim when there is unpleasant business to be handled. I did not share Elsie's belief that the lad's mind was affected, but having regard to the promise I had given, I felt bound to make such an investigation as lay within my power. If, after all, she turned out to be right, there would be a strong moral responsibility on me to do my best for him. Now that I had had an interval for reflection, I felt no desire to punish or humiliate him. Mad or sane, there was an end of the engagement, and I had found myself dwelling upon this reflection with a sense of relief that had gone far to abate my wrath.

The outer door of the chambers stood open, but no

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answer was returned to my repeated rappings on the inner door. As I stood on the mouldy landing, I became conscious that somewhere near at hand a violent and continuous hammering was in progress. Thinking that there must be workmen engaged inside, and that this noise had overpowered the sound of the knocker, I tried the handle, and the door opened before me. The noise was now almost deafening. I crossed the lobby, and after knocking without result at a door in front of me, I opened it and found myself in a small sitting-room. From the glance that I cast around, before I was satisfied that it was empty, I learned that it was squalidly furnished, and that the light came in dimly through dirty windows hung with faded curtains of red baize. The only sign of life was a black kitten, well-nourished and very fluffy, which sat winking and blinking on one of the window-seats. Through a half-open door on my right, I could see something of an adjoining room with a bed in it. My nose warned me that the air of the place was stale and heavy, and that it bore a suspicion of mice and an all-pervading odour of dryrot. I now knew that the hammering came from the adjoining set of chambers. The dry woodwork of the partitions between, reverberated like a drum.

I was about to beat a hasty retreat, when my eye fell on the bed in the next room, and I saw that Charles Hartrigg was stretched upon it, motionless and fully dressed. That he could sleep through such

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an uproar was so surprising that, in my astonishment, I advanced a step or two in order to get a better view. My foot caught in the ragged carpet, and I stumbled forward in a cloud of dust. I was on the threshold of the bedroom when I recovered myself. The next instant I had stepped back horror-struck, for a lifeless body was before me. Rigid upon his back, with dropped jaw and staring eyes, lay Charles Hartrigg. When I was steady enough to move forward and look down upon him, I was conscious of another cold thrill; for the clenched hands and wrought features told of a hard struggle.

At the bed head, hard by the old latticed window, I stood stupefied, my brain drumming to the noise of the hammering.

"Death settles all scores," said I at length, and my thoughts turned to the bright promise of less than a year ago. I took the hand nearest to me and pressed it in token of reconciliation and farewell. But no sooner had my fingers closed upon the cold flesh, than I felt the body start and shudder under the contact.

This last shock was too much for my nerves. As I snatched away my hand, my head swam, and I had to cling to the window-seat for support. But my eyes were still upon the figure on the bed; and though the whole thing passed in a flash, I was conscious that to a twitching of the limbs and a convulsion of the features, the jaw righted itself and the eyelids fell.

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For a moment the body lay motionless; then, slowly and languidly, the eyes opened. Though they met mine, there was neither life nor comprehension in them. But the next instant they were aflame with terror, and with great drops of perspiration standing on his forehead, Charles Hartrigg was staring up into my face like a wild animal at bay.

"This is a terrible business," said I, at length. My eyes had fallen before that dreadful glare, and I had taken time to collect my thoughts. The hammering had ceased; and, during the pause, the silence had been so intense that I had heard the kitten washing itself at the further end of the next room.

"That *you* should have taken to the drug habit——" I went on; and, being unable to proceed, my eyes sought his face. The terror had gone out of it, and it was dull and heavy, but in such expression as it wore I seemed to read a sense of relief. Slowly and painfully he dragged himself up into a sitting posture, his shoulders supported by the bed-head. Speechless and inert, he leaned back all of a heap, quite motionless except for a slight twitching of the fingers. I thought of Elsie's fluttering hands, and I wondered whether she had ever seen him in this bemused and abject state.

"It's no good saying anything now—perhaps it never will be any good. But I want you to know this—whatever I may think of what has gone by, you

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needn't look upon me as an enemy. If I can be of any use, don't be afraid to call upon me."

I had recovered myself by this time, and I was speaking gravely, and without any trace of anger; but when I reached this point he raised one hand to stop me.

" You're not speaking for yourself," he began huskily. " You don't feel like that—no man could. It was Elsie——"

The mention of the name was too much for him. Moving heavily and wearily, like one in the last stage of exhaustion, he turned away from me; and slipping down upon the pillow, he lay there with his face buried in his hands. I caught the sound of a low moan, and I saw his shoulders quiver.

I was so shaken that I passed from the bedside to the staircase without being conscious of any interval. When I had carefully shut the "oak" behind me, I was glad to lean against it, for I was sick and giddy. The staircase window was open, and here the air was fresh and invigorating compared with that inside.

" What a lair ; what a den !" I ejaculated, as soon as I was in a condition to think at all. " He must have taken it over from the last tenant just as it stood. What a hurry——"

I broke off with a start, for a rustling sound at my feet made my disordered nerves quiver. It was only the black kitten playing with a dead leaf.

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"I must get out of this place," said I, rousing myself; "all this must be walked off."

"And he vowed to Elsie that he wasn't drugging himself," I mused, as I made my way downstairs. "It was hardly worth his while to tell the lie."

"Was it a lie, though?" was my next thought. "Whoever heard of a drug taking all the life out of a man like that? And why did the pressure of a hand wake him up, if he could sleep through all that noise?"

I stopped dead; for a suspicion which took my breath away had flashed upon me, and through my brain there was surging a crowd of memories and images, that made it reel. When this chaos had subsided, the suspicion had hardened into a certainty. I knew now what calamity had befallen him. The secret of the old magicians had been unveiled. Charles Hartrigg had been put to his election, after all.

CHAPTER VI

My walking powers are not what they were when I was twenty years younger, but I had tramped as far as Fulham, before the ferment in my brain had calmed down enough to allow my physical members to remind me that I was weary, and that my inner man was empty.

I took a cab to the club, where to the best of my belief, I dined and conversed with my fellows and played my rubber much as I was wont to do, though all the time there was a feeling upon me that it was not a real world that I was moving in. But vivid though the feeling was, there lay behind it a full consciousness of the reality of the shadows that beset me ; for again and again, when I longed to wake up and find that all was a bad dream, I chided myself for my foolishness in craving for the impossible.

It was midnight before I left the cardroom ; and when I gained my own chamber, and heard the Inn clock chime hour after hour, as I sat over my solitary fire, a sense of calamity so overpowering grew upon me that my head sank into my hands, and I wept like a child. But the next instant a new terror

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flashed across my brain, and I found myself on my feet, eager to hide all trace of my weakness, as though I had been disturbed by an onlooker. How could I be sure that, unseen by me, the miserable being from whose presence I had fled that afternoon was not at my side? This was the reflection that had stung me into activity. And humiliating though it was, it brought me to myself; for pity and all other gentler emotions gave way to a feeling of blind rage that any fellow-creature should have gained dominion over my privacy.

"You may spy, and pry, and eavesdrop here, until you get sick of it!" I cried aloud. "There's nothing to hide from you in my dull life."

I spoke the truth, but for many, many days a sense of the possible presence of that invisible watcher was never long absent from my thoughts; and strange to say, the habit which solitude engenders, and which in a lonely man, is knitted up to every fibre of his being, fell from me like a garment. I made no resolution on the subject, nor did I even think of it; but long months afterwards, I overheard a man talking to himself, and I awoke to the knowledge that never since my vigil of that early morning had I uttered a thought aloud.

Fortunately, no healthy man who has a business to attend to, can remain for ever a victim to his imagination. As time went on, my thoughts returned to their ordinary channels, and I was able

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to smoke my last pipe over the fire with all my old tranquillity of mind. But I was hag-ridden during the watches of the night, long after Charles Hartrigg had ceased to trouble my dreams; for had I ever the ill-fortune to wake up in the small hours, woe betide me! If at that dead time sleep forsook me for only a moment, the question, which, in my waking hours I could now put aside with unconcern drove me nearly frantic. "How and where is that boy's spirit employing itself?" the inward voice would ask, and straightway the brain would rouse itself, and be all a-fever to find an answer. But this was a hopeless task for an imagination such as mine. Powerless to soar into the regions of its quest, but master for the time being of the poor body that cried aloud for sleep, my mind could do no more than beat its wings against the bounds that caged it. And all the time, the lair that smelt and tasted of dryrot, the squalid bed, and the rigid figure stretched upon it, were a horrid physical reality; and my bedroom in Verulam Buildings seemed to change into an attic under the tiles of Clifford's Inn, with Charles Hartrigg lying there insensible—a dead maggot in a rotten nut.

Soon after the end of the Long Vacation Mr. Trevor Hampson had begun to bestir himself.

"What on earth has happened to the boy?" was his opening question, when in answer to a note, I had looked in at his chambers. Mr. Hampson's business is so enormous that these chambers are a sort of

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factory for the production of legal drafts. He himself, represents the driving power and his "devils" and other helpers are the looms and spindles of the concern.

"He's the best pupil I ever had. I never came across a youngster with such a head. The way he got up the figures in one or two City cases was astonishing. Such a neat draftsman, too! He worked like a galley-slave until after Whitsuntide. Then he got a bit slack. I thought he seemed so run down that I packed him off for a holiday before the Vacation began. He hasn't shown his face here since."

"He may have been here, nevertheless," thought I; "he may be here, even now." But I said nothing.

"He takes no notice of my letters."

Mr. Hampson rose irritably to his feet and stood on the rug.

"What does it all mean?" he asked confidentially.

"I know nothing of his movements."

"He's got into some mess, and the young fool thinks he's done for. Shall I go and talk to him?"

"I wouldn't if I were you," I answered gloomily; and seeing that he was not satisfied, I tapped my forehead.

"Good God!" ejaculated the busy little man.
"Who'd have thought it possible!"

The pause that followed did not last for half a minute, but it was long enough to clear Mr. Hampson's

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mind of Charles Hartrigg once and for all. One of the machines had broken down beyond repair ; another must be provided in its place. That was the end of the matter.

" So sorry ! " he said, as he offered me his hand ; and before I had reached the door, he was deep in the set of papers, which he had been reading when I was shown in.

Later on, a little bromide, supplemented by a fortnight at Sandwich, put an end to my terrors by night, and as the months slipped by, all sense of being watched died away. Common sense told me that however unscrupulously Charles Hartrigg might practise his accursed gift, there was nothing in the common round of my life to make it worth his while to spy upon me, and I began to wonder over, and half doubt, the recollection of what I had gone through.

But one Sunday evening, long after I had shaken off my spectres, I had an unexpected reminder of all that I had suffered at their hands. Elsie had taken me to church, and, as the sermon proceeded, my mind sank into lethargy. But my ears still took in the preacher's words, and a mention of the omniscient and all-seeing Eye brought me up with a start. While the good man was enlarging upon the sense of comfort and security, which a knowledge of being always watched over must bring to all of us, many things passed through my mind, and I scanned the faces of such of the worshippers as were within my range.

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The bland and rather bored acquiescence, that beamed from most of them clashed so oddly with my recollections that I fell to wondering how many of my neighbours could go on living their lives of that day and the days before it, if they attached any rational meaning to the familiar words. Buried in the speculations to which this thought gave rise, I lost all sense of the time and place, until a gentle nudge brought me back to things seen, and to a knowledge that the preacher was relating a deathbed anecdote, and that I was gazing up at him with a sardonic grin, which stretched from ear to ear.

My next reminder was of a more tragic kind. It came upon me as I was strolling along Fleet Street on my way to Somerset House, one May afternoon more than two years after my visit to Clifford's Inn.

I was hard by Child's Bank when I happened to notice a man some twenty paces ahead. It was the lifeless abstraction of his air, as he moved slowly towards me, staring in front of him and evidently seeing nothing, that attracted my notice; and as I scrutinized him, I saw that his whole aspect was shabby and neglected. Woefully thin and pinched, his clothes hung about him as if they had been made for one of stouter build, and I marked that his hat-brim had been in the wars, and that the tie which hung below his filthy collar was not buttoned inside his waistcoat. At first sight I had set him down for a Fleet Street waif, a hanger-on to the foul fringe of

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sporting journalism, but as we passed one another, I saw that he was no wastrel of that type. I felt a shiver run through me; for there was something uncanny in his lack-lustre, absent eyes. And that was not all. My glance at close quarters had called up some half-forgotten image of bygone days, which had brought me to a standstill and set my memory working. The thing I was groping for was some other face of ill-omen, grey, hollow, and thin-bearded, but not with those eyes. The next moment I had wheeled round. Identification had followed in a flash, and in my mind's eye I had a clear picture of John Hartrigg sitting in my office chair and giving instructions for his will.

The man who had called up this vision, was still crawling eastward, his hands clasped behind him and his shoulders bent, and he looked neither to the right hand nor to the left. I had taken him to be some worn-out wretch of fifty or thereabouts; but, gazing after him and recalling his features, I knew that, notwithstanding those haunted eyes, and the weedy beard that covered so much of the face below them, he was Charles Hartrigg and no other; and with a sense of desolation I remembered that he was five and twenty. As I watched him I received assurance that the weird look, which had so moved me was no freak of my imagination, for I saw more than one casual wayfarer stare at him as he passed, and then turn to look back. It was many hours later, when

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over my last pipe, I thought over this, that a fragment of Shakespeare came into my mind—

"Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters."

My third reminder came home in a very curious way. The editor of the *Posthorn* is an old friend of mine. I found myself seated opposite to him in the club dining-room one evening not long after reminder number two.

"Getting near the time for you to begin your day's work!" said I, cheerful in the consciousness that I had finished mine. "Your *Posthorn* played a queer tune last week."

The paper had astonished the world by an announcement that a great political leader, who was reported to be slightly indisposed, was stricken with a mortal disease, and would never again be seen by the public eye. The usual denials had followed; but a few days later the news was officially confirmed by one of the medical journals. It is not often nowadays, that a newspaper gets a piece of exclusive information so sensational that it flutters the stock markets of two hemispheres.

My old friend winced. "I was away when it came in," he said.

"Shouldn't you have taken it?"

"I won't say that; I didn't know then what I know now."

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"They had to decide at once," he went on. "It was such a big job that they called in the proprietor; and as he said 'Yes,' and I wasn't there, that settled it."

"As you have refused, over and over, again to tell me who gets the newspapers their 'Wills and Bequests,' I suppose you won't tell me who sent this news in," said I, by way of a mild joke.

"It's a damned shame!" he burst out. "You can't think what pains they took to guard the secret. They were trying to keep it from the Old Lady, in the hope that she'd die first. Now, there's a pretty kettle of fish. And it's weakened our position in the negotiations; everybody knows that the Government mayn't last a month."

My friend was evidently much upset that his venerable organ should have done all this mischief. He lapsed into a frowning silence, and I went on with my dinner.

Presently he looked up with a jerk. "Wasn't that ward of yours named Hartrigg?" he asked.

"Yes; whatever made you think of him?"

At any time the sudden mention of the name would have disconcerted me; but to hear it just then was particularly irritating. Charles Hartrigg had been much in my thoughts that day, and I had had more than enough of him. By the morning's post I had received a letter from South America, telling me that the uncle to whom my testator had lent

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the thousand pounds was dead, and that there seemed a likelihood that all his debts would be paid.

I dare say I spoke to my friend rather sharply ; but he met my question with so much confusion that, as soon as he had gone, I began to search my memory for the explanation.

This was, alas ! only too easy to find. One had only to recall the talk, which had gone before, to have the truth staring one in the face. My dinner came to an abrupt end, and for the next few hours I was striding about London with my brain in a ferment. I was so dog-tired when I went to bed that exhaustion and a dose of bromide put me to sleep ; but that night, and for several nights to come, my dreams were full of the attics in Clifford's Inn and the worn wreck who lay hidden there.

CHAPTER VII

CORRESPONDENCE with my South American agent respecting the old debt, extended over a period of more than a year. When things had advanced so far as to satisfy me that payment was only a matter of time, I had felt it my duty to make a report to my beneficiary, and with my letter I had sent him a copy of two or three of my agent's communications. These he sent back with a niggling, unsteady scrawl, very unlike his handwriting of other days, to the effect that he would be glad to leave the matter to my unfettered discretion.

I put his letter among my records of the administration, and was about to tear up the enclosures and throw them into the waste-paper basket, when a paper fluttered out of them, and settled before me, inviting perusal. A somewhat moving document I found it. Its nature was apparent at a glance, and the same glance made me master of its contents. It was a broker's bought-note, evidencing the fact that Charles Hartrigg, Esquire, had purchased a sum of fifty thousand pounds India Threes.

"Fifteen hundred a year," I thought, as I sat with my eyes glued upon the scrap of paper.

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By what means had the purchase-money been got together? How many secrets had the boy sold to one and another, and how often had he made his coup on the Stock Exchange, before that vast hoard had been accumulated? And perhaps he had made other investments! This thought landed one in such a world of wonder and surmise that I sprang to my feet, and, rolling the note into a ball, I flung it into the fire. I knew that it was of no value; and, acting on the impulse of the moment, I got rid of it by the quickest means at my disposal.

At last my agent reported that the uncle's estate was ready for division, and that upon receipt of a power of attorney from myself and "the heir," as he called him, the thousand pounds and certain interest thereon would be paid over. I sent an engrossment of the power to Charles Hartrigg for execution by him, and I gave him full instructions as to the formalities to be observed. On the following morning my stolid, unemotional Peacock came in to me with a scared face, and announced in a voice, which he was hardly able to control, that "Mr. Charles" was in the waiting-room.

At first, I was too astonished to speak; then there came over me such a sense of terror and repulsion, that I doubted for a moment whether I could bear the sight of him.

"What does he look like?" I whispered, in a voice as shaky as Peacock's own.

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"A deal worse than his father did," was the answer.

"I suppose I must see him?" I groaned. "Show him in?"

How I dreaded his entrance as I sat watching the door, and vowing to myself that I would not take his hand, and yet doubting whether, after all, I should be able to stand to my resolution!

But I was not put to the test; for, as always happens in real life, nothing fell out as one had anticipated. A movement outside brought me to my feet, and then the door swung wide open, and Charles Hartrigg came in clinging to Peacock's arm. There was no question of shaking hands; I had only to stand by, and strive to show no trace of the emotion that almost overpowered me. Slow and faltering was the visitor's progress towards my table; and when he had been conducted to the client's chair—the chair in which his father had sat some nine years before—he sank into it like a decrepit man of eighty.

"I am very ill," he panted, wiping his forehead; "but this is quite exceptional."

"You were a deal better when you came," said Peacock, encouragingly.

I dismissed my henchman by a nod. I was in my own chair by this time, and I sat waiting for my visitor to recover himself.

"I wouldn't have troubled you," he began, as he fumbled about in a breast pocket, and at length

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produced my foolscap envelope and a frayed mass of small documents ; "but I gathered that you wanted something done with this, and I didn't feel equal to attending to it without your help."

When I had taken the envelope from out his hand, and I watched his fingers playing aimlessly among the accumulated rubbish left behind, I understood how the broker's note had come into my possession.

I disengaged the engrossment from the letter which had covered it, and muttering something about making the necessary arrangements, I was thankful to escape from the room and get into the open air. When the shock of his appearance had worn off a little, I routed out my usual notary and took him across with me. Charles Hartrigg was better by this time, and at length the business was disposed of. That power of attorney is now in my safe. Of the signatures of the two grantors, I think mine is the shakier. I well remember Peacock's astonishment as his eye fell on it, when he sat down to write his name as the second witness.

"It's an odd thing, this debt being paid after all," I remarked, as I put the power into an envelope, when all the formalities had been completed, and Peacock and the notary and the commissioner for oaths had left the room. The transaction of the common-form business, and the movement and small bustle connected with it had quieted my nerves, and the feeling

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of sheer physical repulsion had passed off. "Your father looked upon it as a bad debt."

"Do you remember my father coming here?" he asked.

"Yes, I remember him." With the son sitting within a few feet of me, I was not likely to forget the father's visit.

"It was only a week or two before he died. It was his heart that was wrong. It's the nerves with me."

"You're under treatment, I suppose?" I was obliged to say something, and this was all that I could think of.

"Oh yes; my laundress fetched a man in. I was very bad then. He's been patching me up a good bit lately."

I wondered whether the doctor was responsible for the improvement in his patient's dress. There was nothing noticeably shabby or untidy about it that morning.

I made no attempt to keep up the conversation. Our business was over, and I wanted him to be gone. He, however, seemed to be in no hurry. He had sunk into a reverie, and was idly tapping the fingers of one hand on the arm of his chair. I made a pretence of arranging the papers on my table, but one cannot fiddle about in that way for ever, and at length I got up and crossed the room to lock up my safe. The fingers were still beating up and down; and as I

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passed him on my way back to the table, I saw his face twitch violently. Things were growing unbearable.

"Are those cousins of yours still living?" I inquired in desperation.

He turned to me with a jerk. "Eh! what? Are they living? I think so. I'm really not sure. I forget things so."

For a minute or two he sat silent and bewildered, searching his memory for something which persisted in eluding him.

"I'm fit for nothing," he said despairingly. "I'm going to Australia—in a sailing-ship. I think I shall settle there. I want to make a fresh start altogether."

I could think of no answer; I could only wonder whether he would live to reach his destination. After another pause, he took up his hat and began to smooth it nervously.

"It makes one remember old times to be here again," he began. "Are you and yours quite well—all quite well?" There was no mistaking the meaning in his tone.

"I think everybody's in the best of health—yes, everybody."

My answer was conventional in word and manner, but his veiled reference to Elsie had touched me a little. Standing out against a background of shadow and mystery, there were two things, as to which I had never felt a doubt—he had loved her with an

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honest, boyish love, and because of her, there had been a hard struggle when he reached the parting of the ways. And since the shadows had closed over him, Time had done much to heal the mischief he had wrought with regard to her. She was happy now; the young life had regained its buoyancy, and there was a promise of wedding bells in the air.

These were the reflections that passed through my mind, as I sat longing for him to make a move, and I was conscious that a feeling akin to pity had followed in their train. Long afterwards, a new light flashed upon me—perhaps, after all, he had acknowledged some limitations in the exercise of his accursed gift; perhaps he had spared me and mine. I could not doubt that he had asked his question in good faith.

At last he rose wearily to his feet.

"You had better take your letter," I said, pointing to yesterday's envelope, which still lay on the table.

He lurched a little as he turned to pick it up, and with one hand he clung to the chair to steady himself. I hastened to his side, but seeing that he wished for no help, I moved off, so as not to appear to be watching him, and I kept my eyes averted until I heard the envelope rustle into his pocket. On his way to the door he gave another lurch, and this time I caught hold of his arm.

"I'm afraid this is my own fault," he said,

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apologetically; "I believe I forgot to have any breakfast."

"You must have some soup; it's just my lunch-time. We'll take a cab."

I spoke on the impulse of the moment; to stand by and do nothing with a fellow creature in that state seemed out of the question. I groaned in spirit the moment after I had made my offer, but there was no loophole of escape; and presently we were seated at my usual table in the grill-room of the Holborn, and Mr. King was offering me his customary welcome. I have been on a friendly footing with the managers and head waiters of two or three restaurants in my time; and let no man laugh, who dines at his family mahogany, if I say that the "welcome at an inn" has never seemed a little thing to me.

Our lunch proceeded in silence. I was in a state of veiled nervous irritation, and though my guest made a feeble attack upon his soup, he seemed hardly able to lift the spoon to his lips.

"Do you see that woman—the one with the foreigner?"

The quick, shrill whisper took me so completely by surprise, that I looked point-blank in the direction of his gaze. But I could see nothing more startling than an elderly American couple—typical New Englanders, both of them—having a real good time at a table close at hand.

"Not those old fools—beyond them, to the left."

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The intense irritation in his voice jarred my nerves afresh, but I took a more diplomatic survey this time. I saw the pair he meant; a dark, foreign-looking man with elaborately curled hair and many rings, and a Juno of a woman, nearly thirty, perhaps, but wearing a sort of baby freshness in her peach-bloom complexion and deep, dewy eyes.

I was beginning to think that my companion was mad. He had pushed his plate from him and was stretching forward, twisting a tablespoon between his two hands. At this moment the foreign woman chanced to look in our direction. A round-eyed wonder came into her face as she caught sight of the wild stare bent upon her; then, as her eyes rested full upon him, the heavy lids drooped a little, and a look of intense mental concentration altered her whole aspect. But, in a flash, all sign of intellectual power had vanished; the lilies and roses were holding the field again, and the baby eyes were dwelling upon Charles Hartrigg with a look of measureless contempt. The next moment she was dimpling into a smile as she held out a many-bangled wrist, as a hint to her companion that her glove wanted buttoning.

“They’re going!”

His excitement was so uncontrollable, and his tone so full of consternation, that I laid a restraining hand upon his arm. People were beginning to look at us.

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"I can't stop," he went on, in the same high whisper, as he watched the preparations for departure; and, but for my tightening grasp upon his arm, he would have risen to his feet.

"It will kill you," I said meaningly.

"She's escaped me twice," he panted, as he struggled to get free. "Don't you understand? She's a political agent."

By this time the pair had left their table and were moving to the door.

I could hold him no longer, but as he turned to follow them, I made a snatch at him.

"For God's sake, take your hat!" I hissed into his ear. "You're making an exhibition of both of us."

I thrust his hat into his hands, and without putting it on his head he started off with a rapid zigzag motion, more like that of a machine than a human being. Before he had reached the door through which his quarry had disappeared, he was on the run; a horrible paralytic scramble such as my eyes had never seen.

I comforted myself with the reflection that the order of his going was no concern of mine; and as soon as he had disappeared I sank back in my chair with a sense of relief too deep for words. I had seen the heads on both sides of his passage, turn round to stare at the scrambling figure with the mad eyes, and then dip forward to exchange comments; but now

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that I was free of him, I cared nothing for the sensation which he had made. I was not a whit disconcerted when I heard the old lady from New England shrill forth something in an unknown tongue; and I was even mildly amused when, after an interval of a minute or two, Uncle Hiram, whose mind seemed to work slowly, looked up from a plate of sweet omelette and baked potato, and grunted out an expression of his entire concurrence.

When, later on, I cleared up my table for the day, my sense of satisfaction and relief was a little dashed by the discovery that Charles Hartrigg had pocketed the envelope containing the power of attorney, instead of the envelope containing my yesterday's letter. But I was in a hurry to keep a dinner engagement; so I contented myself for the time being by anathematizing my own folly in having permitted the mistake, and I let the question of recovering the power slide until the morrow.

CHAPTER VIII

I DINED that evening at Clothworkers' Hall. I drank out of old Sam Pepys' loving-cup, and heard an ex-law-officer respond in glib phrases to the toast of "Our Glorious Constitution in Church and State." The night was so young and so lovely when I turned out into Mincing Lane that I decided to stroll to the Temple and beat up the quarters of a certain old crony of mine in Pump Court. The season was mid-summer, and the City lay hushed and empty under a grand full moon.

My thoughts turned to the events of the day as I strolled along, smoking the excellent cigar which had been given to me in the vestibule, and I made a mental note to write next morning and ask for the return of the missing document. When, however, I remembered the condition in which Charles Hartrigg had left the Holborn, I wondered whether my letter would be attended to, and again I cursed my own negligence. I had got as far as Fleet Street by this time, and the fact that I was within a stone's-throw of those awful attics suddenly occurred to me. "You're afraid," said an inward monitor, as the possibility of

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fetching away the document, then and there, presented itself. But I was valorous with a good dinner and two or three glasses of sound port, and I trod my fears underfoot: possibly I had had a glass of champagne as well. I was conscious of a sort of curiosity to see the courts of Clifford's Inn under that glorious moon, and perhaps I had a sneaking expectation of finding the outer door of the chambers shut. The college maxim, that a sported oak is sacred, meets with an even more rigid observance among the dwellers in our Inns of Court and Chancery.

I entered Clifford's Inn in company with some star of the music-halls. She and her dresser went up the passage in front of me, and we joined forces at the lodge. To this lady, who was evidently a resident in the Inn, the porter expressed a deferential hope that she had gone well, and she assured him that she had gone "immense—perfectly immense: a curtain after every song." I slipped in without challenge. It tickled me to think that the man was taking me for the singing woman's escort.

The tiny inner court upon which Clifford's Inn Passage opens, was nearly all in shadow, and very black were the trees in the garden of the court beyond, as I saw them through the tunnel that runs alongside the hall. I thought of my early days in the law when, on rare occasions, I had been sent down to keep guard on some summons, amid the rough-and-tumble of old Judges' Chambers, just beyond those trees. No vestige

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remains of the “Beargarden” of my young days, except the flagged terrace on which it used to front ; and when I had passed the hall, the massive bulk of the Record Office and its square tower stood full in view, with the moon riding in the clear skies behind. Court and garden were flooded with moonlight. The old roofs, with their dormer windows, were masses of ink and silver ; and where, between the hall and the garden, the moonlight lay sleeping on the pavement, the stone cubes that marked the passage-ways gleamed snow-white against the moss-grown cobbles through which they ran. When I scanned the few lighted windows, I observed, with a sense of relief, that the garrets to which I was bound were all in darkness. I had forgotten the red-baize curtains.

The lights on the winding stair were very dim ; but thanks to the moon, I was able to mount it without stumbling. Charles Hartrigg’s “oak” was not sported. I stood upon the landing, staring at the inner door, and fighting against a strong temptation to turn tail. But bolder counsels prevailed, and I plied the knocker. Thrice I plied it without result. Then, inspired by a sudden determination to see the thing through, come what might, I turned the handle.

There was no light in the lobby, but I could see the door of the sitting-room straight ahead. I tapped at it two or three times, and then entered. Though the night was hot and airless, the atmosphere of the place was less foul than it had been that October

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afternoon, some four years earlier. The only light came from a lowered gas-jet over the mantelpiece.

As soon as I was standing in the dead silence, my nerves began to play me false, and I cast a look over my left shoulder, to make sure that my line of retreat to the landing was still open. At this moment the door leading to the bedroom creaked on its hinges, and the lock rattled. I felt my hair rise as I turned, quick as lightning, to face the direction of the sound. Even in the faint light, a glance satisfied me that the door had been left ajar, and that a light air had swung it to. It was moving gently inwards as I looked at it; and wrathful at having trembled at such a shadow, I stepped forward and drummed upon it with two fingers. Notwithstanding my sudden valour, I was half conscious of a reluctance to make more noise than was absolutely necessary. I did not repeat the drumming; steeling myself to behold what I felt sure lay on the other side, I pushed the door open.

My anticipation was justified this time; but the reality fell short of my fears. The latticed window stood wide open, and through it the moonlight was flooding the upper part of the figure stretched upon the bed. He was rigid as death, but the eyes were closed and the haggard, bearded face was free from distortion. I found myself gazing upon Charles Hartrigg with unshrinking eyes as he lay there in his shirt sleeves, his forehead and the hollows of his cheeks gleaming like ivory; for the sight before me

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was as nothing compared with the nightmare picture, that had so often made me sweat with terror during the small hours. The details of that picture were all visible to my inward eye ; and standing in the presence of the reality, I made comparison between the two. So calmly could I scan the room, and the prospect on which the window opened, that I noted how near the Record Office was, and how crystalline the stone-work looked in that delicious moonlit air. I noted, too, the discarded coat and a pair of kicked-off shoes. Hanging on the bed-head, within a foot or two of the set face, every detail of the coat was visible, and peeping out of the breast pocket was the thing which I had come for.

After a moment's hesitation, I slipped across the room and took possession of it. The possibility of Charles Hartrigg missing it was too remote to be worth considering, and the temptation to get back my own and have done with him was irresistible.

In stretching forward to twitch out the envelope, I got a glimpse of that part of the bedstead which lay in shadow. I saw that the crossed feet were shoeless, and that near them a cat was curled up asleep. Remembering the kitten of my former visit, I peered forward to get a better view of the black ball, and as I did so I heard the body stir ! The rustle on the counterpane was faint, but unmistakable. In a flash I was back upon the threshold, but before leaving the place for ever I turned to take a last look at the bed.

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I was disposed to think, as I scanned what lay there, that my ears had played me false, for the figure was as motionless as a graven image upon an altar tomb. But the next instant a spasm shot across the features, and before I could move hand or foot, the whole body was in a state of violent convulsion. To shut my eyes and cling to the doorway for support was all that I could do. But to blot that contorted figure out of sight was not of much avail, so long as one's ears performed their office.

At last the convulsion raged no longer. The bed-springs ceased their jarring ; but before one could draw a breath of relief, the silence was rent by a burst of sound that seemed to make the old place quiver. It was like the launching of a rocket, only its duration was a mere flash. Following upon this roar so closely, as to seem to grow out of it, rose the angry swearing of a cat. Then the animal jumped down, and all was still.

When I ventured to open my eyes, my head was half-turned from the direction of the bedstead, and I saw nothing but the floor to the right of the window, and the cat shaking its head as if after a blow. I did not dare to look towards the bed ; but little by little I enlarged my field of vision, until it took in the open window and the pinnacled tower beyond. I noticed that both halves of the lattice were quivering.

The tranquillity of the prospect outside steadied my nerves somewhat, and at length I turned towards

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the bedstead to learn the worst. All that I saw there was a disturbed and furrowed counterpane and two disordered pillows. The body was no longer visible. Hardly knowing what I did, I moved forward; my eyes glued upon the spot where I had seen Charles Hartrigg lying. But the fact that he was no longer there was too manifest for doubt. I stood in the middle of the room, my eyes bent on the floor, my arms hanging loosely at my sides, and my mind for the time being, in a state of collapse. I saw the cat come up to me, and I heard him purr as he bared his white teeth and rubbed himself against my legs. Suddenly, when he reared himself and sought to approach my hand, my stupor and a sense of nausea that had been growing on me ever since my entry into these accursed rooms, gave place to a thrill of terror, that was nothing less than hysteria.

"How do I know that you are not a familiar?" I cried aloud, as I shook myself free and menaced the cat with my foot.

Then I turned and fled. I know that force of habit led me to slam the "oak" behind me, but I remember nothing more of my passage into the open air. When I came to something approaching my right mind, I was on hands and knees upon the grass-grown cobble-stones of that part of the court which juts off southwards, and I was in the throes of violent sickness.

CHAPTER IX

SOME four or five hours later I was tossing on my bed in an agony of fear and brain-irritation, when I heard an urgent knocking at my outer door. I felt no doubt as to what the summons meant.

I can hardly bear to recall the agonies which I had suffered during those hours. I felt no doubt that the man was dead, and I was glad that he was gone. When, where, and how he would be found, and what would be the inquiries afterwards, were the questions that tortured me. My mental disturbance was such that, when at length I managed to shake my mind free of these problems, a trumpery doubt whether, under the circumstances, I ought to send the power to South America seized upon me, and worried me into a new fever of anxiety. When I passed from this topic, and began for the hundredth time to speculate upon the possibilities attending the discovery of Charles Hartrigg's body, coatless and shoeless, I was almost beside myself.

The knocking scared me for a moment; but a certain sense of relief followed close upon it. It could only mean one thing—the body had been

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found. I felt glad that I was face to face with the worst so soon.

I rose and put on a dressing-gown and slippers. The knocking was repeated once or twice during this process; but I did not let it hurry me. I felt that I must meet the crisis with as much outward calmness as I could summon up.

Before opening the door, I took advantage of a certain spy-hole which commands the landing. My visitors were three in number. The knocking party was the head porter. His companions were a policeman and a little bunch of an old woman.

"What is it?" I shouted through the letter-slit.

"Bad news, sir," was the policeman's answer.

I opened the door so far as the chain would permit.

"What news?" I asked, taking care not to show myself.

"A gentleman's body has been found——" began the head-porter.

"It's Mr. 'Artrigg's," broke in the old woman.

"Where?" I demanded, in as firm a tone as I could command.

"Close under Waterloo Bridge, sir." The policeman was speaking now. "It was found an hour ago. Life had been extinct some time."

This, then, was the Fates' answer to my terrors. I felt a new man as I reviewed the position in the light of the good news. But an afterthought struck me in the midst of my jubilation.

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"Any suspicion of foul play?" I asked.

"Lord, no, sir! It's suicide."

I could open the door now and usher the party into my breakfast-room with a proper, professional demeanour—shocked, but unruffled. The gardens looked fresh and beautiful in the pearly light of the early morning. Two rooks were stalking about the tennis-lawn just under my windows.

"Tell me all about it," said I, to the policeman
"Let him tell his story!" I added to the little woman, who was craning forward in her eagerness to forestall him.

The body had been found by the Thames police on the mud of the Surrey side, just east of Waterloo Bridge. The ebb tide had left it half exposed. A watch, and a purse containing certain monies had been found upon it. In the purse was a paper giving a name with an address in Clifford's Inn. Inquiries of the night-porter there, had led the authorities to the good lady, whom I saw before me. She had referred them to my chambers, and had insisted on coming too.

"From what she says, it's plain the gentleman wasn't responsible for his actions," the policeman wound up. "Would you believe it, sir, he was out-of-doors without his coat or his boots on?"

"You'd think nothing of that, if you knew him as well as I do," snapped out the good lady.

Small of stature, bent almost double with age

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and rheumatism, and clad in garments that suggested a marine store, she was one of the unloveliest old women I had ever seen. She was almost repulsive as she sat, with two watery little eyes fixed on me, while her jaw munched up and down, and her infamous shoes dangled some inches above the carpet.

"What are you?" I asked.

"I'm his 'ousekeeper."

I managed to suppress a shudder. I knew that every Inn laundress called herself by the loftier title; but to associate that dreadful little woman with any kind of domestic service was enough to make a man's gorge rise.

"He said as if anything was to 'appen to him, I was to go at once to the gentleman wrote on this."

As she spoke, she handed me a scrap of paper. It bore my name and address in Charles Hartrigg's handwriting.

"I was his guardian under his father's will," I explained to a constable; "but that was years ago, and I've seen next to nothing of him since."

"He never saw nobody," interposed the house-keeper.

"Of course, there must be an inquest," I went on. "But it seems to me that this good lady, and his medical attendant, and the people of the inn can give all the necessary evidence. When will the inquest be?"

About Toosday, the policeman thought. It had

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occurred to my mind that unless the authorities learned from me that I had recently been in communication with the deceased, those communications need not come to light, and therefore the sooner I put myself at a distance from all official inquirers, the better.

"This is Saturday," I remarked; "I want to go to Sandwich to-day to play golf. Do you think I need be back before Tuesday morning?"

The policeman thought not. After I had toyed significantly with certain silver moneys, that chanced to be on the mantelpiece, he felt no doubt on the subject. Really, it came to this—what could I speak to? Such was his ultimate conclusion.

"Then I'll go," said I. "I'll give you my address at Sandwich, and I'll undertake to be present at the inquest."

The risk of the night-porter recognizing me was a trifle. I felt certain that he had taken no notice, when I passed him in the train of the music-hall lady; and on going out, I had purposely kept my pallid countenance in the shadow.

The little laundress had sat silent during these deliberations. I had heard her sniffing more than once, and when I turned to her, I saw big tears trickling down her cheeks.

"Cheer up, mother!" said the policeman. "All the crying in the world won't bring the gentleman back again."

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The withered crone resented the suggestion that she was mourning for her dead master.

"Tain't 'im," she said bridling; "it's pore Toby."

"Who's he?" I asked.

The particulars furnished were long and involved, and the recital was attended by much sniffing. It appeared that Toby was a black cat—such a beauty. She had had him as a tiny baby, when she did for the gentleman before Mr. Hartrigg. She had kept him at the chambers because at her own place there was a savage beast of a dog. She had had a lot of trouble in her time. The children was all dead and gone. So was all the ole friends. And as for her husband, he had got that funny in his head, it was almost a blessing in disguise when he made away with himself; though, of course, it wasn't a nice thing to happen. And Mr. Hartrigg wasn't much better. He was that lazy, you couldn't get in to make his bed for days and days together. And yet, the doctor said, it was want of sleep as made him so queer. In all these circumstances, who could expect her to shed tears because the gentleman had chose to go and make away with himself? Parting with pore Toby was quite another matter.

"Why not find another place and get leave to keep him there?"

This suggestion came from the head porter. It sounded feasible enough, but it turned out to be

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impracticable. Toby's mistress was not so young as she had been, and she had made up her mind to go into the House.

"And I can't take 'im there," she wailed. "And when I've left the Inn, 'e'll be crying on the staircase, and picking up what 'e can get. And that'll spoil 'is coat, and 'is pretty years'll get to look as if they was blackleaded. And 'e'll get so thin. And any one'll be able to ill-use 'im ; for when they coaxes 'im, 'e'll run up, 'oping it's something to eat."

The old woman's appearance, as she sat sobbing and sniffing over this dismal prospect, was simply revolting, but there was genuine pathos in her grief. It moved all her three hearers.

"If you'll bring him here," said I, "I'll take charge of him, and see that he has a good time." Perhaps I thought that some measure of atonement was due to "pore Toby."

Tuesday came round in due course. From my chair in the coroner's court, I scanned the persons assembled. The jury were there, and so were the witnesses. Among these was the night-porter. I was relieved to find that he looked at me without any sign of recognition. The rest of the audience was made up of two or three constables and a sprinkling of spectators. While we waited for the coroner, his officer, who turned out to be an old legal acquaintance of mine, beguiled the interval with social chat.

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The case was quite a simple one, he told me ; perhaps suicide, perhaps accidental death. At last, the great man bustled in, and close behind him came a bearded gentleman with elaborate curled hair, and a lovely lady with a bright complexion and innocent blue eyes.

"Foreigners—studying our institutions. They hunted me up yesterday," whispered the officer, as he left me to attend upon his master.

That lady had been much in my thoughts since Charles Hartrigg's tragic end. Fresh air and freedom from anxiety had done much for me during the last three days. Richard was himself again by now ; but at Sandwich, and ever since my return on Monday night, I had wondered, over and over again, whether the dead man's pursuit of the woman, who had thrown him into such a state of excitement at the Holborn, had had anything to do with his death. This unexpected appearance of the two foreigners was a suspicious circumstance, but it was some satisfaction to know that they had not come as witnesses. A public disclosure of that mad episode of last Friday would drag me out into the open.

I cast a discreet glance to where the lady and her companion were standing. My eye met hers, and a faint smile of unmistakable amusement showed itself upon her face. I began to feel very uncomfortable.

Presently the pair came forward, escorted by a constable. I got up to allow the distinguished visitors

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to pass to two vacant chairs a little way beyond my own. The man went by with a florid obeisance. Just before the lady reached me, she dropped a glove. As I restored it to her, she spoke to me in a whisper that breathed a slight foreign accent.

"Monsieur's testimony will be so very interesting," said she, under cover of a bow and a dazzling smile.

I resumed my seat, with cold shivers running down my back.

But, as the inquiry ran its course, my peace of mind gradually came back; the proceedings went on so swiftly, and in such a business-like way. The body was viewed and identified; the finding of it and the cause of the death were duly proved, and the doctor, the laundress, and two of the inn porters gave evidence. Then the coroner leant back, and cleared his throat preparatory to summing up.

I pricked up my ears when, at this moment, I saw one of the jurors whisper something to his neighbour.

"Why ain't it satisfactory?" inquired the other.

"Clifford ought to 'ave come forward and explained," grumbled the whisperer. "What business had he to let the man leave his inn 'alf-dressed—'arf-boozed too, if all was known? He ought to 'ave his licence endorsed."

"Live and let live, mate! Why harry the man—what shall *we* get out of it?"

The coroner's summing up did not occupy three

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minutes. The jury, he said, were intelligent men, and had followed the evidence. The facts of the case were so-and-so. There was no suspicion of violence. The jury had been told of the deceased's state of mind, and his strange secluded way of life. This, that, or the other verdict was open to them—and so forth. In the course of another two minutes the verdict was returned—"Accidental Death!"

I hurried out in the wake of the policeman, who had knocked me up to communicate, what he called, bad news. A brief conference on the stairs enabled me to discharge a certain moral obligation, which had been contracted in Gray's Inn three days before. When I went back for my hat I found that the court was empty, except for the foreign lady and her cavalier. She at once made up to me, leaving him in the background.

"I congratulate Monsieur on his good looks," she said sweetly; "Monsieur was not so well on Friday night."

"May I be permitted to take a chair?" I inquired. Monsieur was not feeling very well at that moment. His legs were threatening to refuse him proper support.

"It is so sad to lose a friend," she resumed, as soon as we were both seated.

"Madame's sympathy would go far to make up for any loss," I returned valiantly; "but Mr. Hartrigg was no friend of mine. Until last Friday I had not spoken to him for nearly four years."

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Her eyes rested on me keenly. "But you knew—*you knew what he was?*" she said.

"From the way in which Madame looked at him in the restaurant I thought *she* knew him, quite well," was my answer.

The foreign lady laughed contemptuously. "I knew nothing until I saw him, but then of course I knew; and I understood very well that he wanted to escort us home. And I knew he could not leave his gross self at the restaurant and follow. How I laughed as we journeyed to Battersea, with our dear friend in another cab behind! And I watched for him to return to spy. *Mon dieu!* for how many hours I watched! And how I laughed when I saw that he was there!"

"You saw him?" I ejaculated.

"Assuredly! And he knew it—but too late! And then our poor Monsieur Mahomet was all anxiety to get back to his mountain. It was for him to wish that. But it was my wish, and my pleasure, that the mountain should itself remove and come to him. And my will was the str-r-ronger."

Madame rolled her "r" and laughed deliciously over this recollection.

"Battersea!" I gasped; "but the body was found quite close to this place."

"Of course! It was in the river that the mountain came to him. It was necessary that he should meet it halfway. What need had one of that

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carrion in our *appartement*? And one might not brave the conveniences—what you English call the proprieties."

"I think I begin to understand," said I.

"I was desolated when I found that Monsieur had assisted at the *dénouement*," she went on, in tones of cooing sympathy; "but one could not have anticipated that. It was a great pleasure to see Monsieur again, but it was so sad when he opened his eyes to find that the poor mountain had vanished all at once."

My faculties were still in a state of considerable disorder, but I was sufficiently myself to chafe under this elaborate mockery. It seemed to me so utterly undeserved. I had to sit and take it, however; for no answer was vouchsafed to me.

"But I will detain Monsieur no longer," she resumed; and there was something in her tone which assured me that she was conscious of my anger, and was enjoying it. "He has been here already for so long, to no advantage. He has not even been called upon for his testimony—and that would have been so interesting!"

She rose as she said this; and we bowed to one another, she radiant and I quite otherwise, before she rejoined her companion near the door. I looked straight down my nose as I walked out; but just as I was crossing the threshold, I heard a swift rustle, and a light hand fell upon my arm. I turned to meet

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the dimpling smile that I had learned to detest so thoroughly.

"There is but one little thing more," she said caressingly, "—the black cat. He could do Monsieur no injury. He is not what you call a witch. He is nothing."

This was my last chance of emerging from the conflict with any fragment of the honours of war. Thanks to my good angel, I was ready to take advantage of it. This was the reward of virtue. An answer rose to my lips; and, greatly daring, I ventured to translate it into the beautiful language of Gaul.

"A thousand thanks," I retorted, with a Parisian bow. "But in that matter, it has been permitted me to anticipate Madame's kind assurance—Monsieur Tobi was yesterday admitted into my household."

THE REV. PATRICK ANGUS

"SOME one wants to see you, sir—very important business, he says." As Peacock made this announcement, he handed me a card.

The document bore traces of antiquity and hard service. It's general tone was brownish, and in the neighbourhood of the edges the hue was more pronounced and wore a high polish. The copper-plate of the name was faint and worn, but it was just legible.

"The Rev. Patrick Angus, B.A.," I read aloud.
"What does he look like?"

Peacock's mouth puckered, and his eyes shifted to the window, and rested upon the clock of Gray's Inn chapel.

"He looks something like a minister," he answered hesitatingly. "He says Mr. Mapleson-Smith advised him to see you." The emphasis which Peacock put upon the "says" was not complimentary to the Rev. Patrick.

In the opinion of many, Mr. Mapleson-Smith is the most eminent solicitor in London, and it must be confessed that his *clientèle* is large and is drawn

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from all classes of society. His offices are just below mine, but I have the merest nodding acquaintance with him, and I have no doubt that he regards me and my methods much as a motor-car may be supposed to regard a sedan-chair. It did seem improbable that Mr. Mapleson-Smith had referred one of his clients to me.

When the caller was ushered in, he proved to be such an extraordinary clerical scarecrow that the bow, with which I generally receive a stranger, arrested itself half made, and I stood and stared at him. The orthodox collar was there, but its hues were those of his visiting-card and the upper part bore the same high polish. He was so thin that his clerical raiment seemed to hang upon him as upon a clothes-prop, and its seediness was such, that even in the Museum reading-room it would have attracted notice. As he stood before me, the September sunshine fell upon his deplorable garments, and I noticed that their tint—which at one moment I should have called green, and the next brown—was masked here and there by a filmy something highly suggestive of mildew, and that all the darns and patches were the work of some incompetent amateur. He stood upright, but with his left knee bent and the foot poised on its tip, close behind the heel of its fellow. Round the toecap of the visible right boot was a string bandage, which bound the upper to the sole. In one hand he held an untidy parcel, done up in

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newspaper, and in the other a silk hat of very disreputable appearance.

When this apparition broke upon me, the oddness of the man's thin figure, draped in such strange apparel, absorbed my whole attention; but when an instant later I came to scrutinize his face, I was astonished to find that it was of an ascetic cast and was almost venerable. It was crowned by an abundant crop of greyish white hair, and despite the smoothness of the forehead and the rose-leaf freshness of the complexion, it was the face of a man who had touched seventy. It was long and thin and, save for a slight frosty stubble, it was clean-shaven. There was a deepening of the rosy-tint about the point of the nose, and this and a certain slackness about the mouth, hinted an explanation of the scarecrow clothing; but the big, grey eyes were so bright and at that moment so helpless, and they wore such a look of appeal, that I forgot the grotesqueness of the man's figure, and stood gazing into his face, half conscious of a vague desire to do something to abate the sorrow of those pleading eyes.

"What is it?" I asked, when we were both seated.

"I must ask you to allow me to begin by telling my story from beginning to end in my own way."

He spoke with placid dignity and in a manner that was undoubtedly that of a gentleman and a clergyman. There was even a suspicion of authority

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in his tone, and yet it was not easy to look upon him, seated there, without smiling. One thin leg was crossed over the other ; the mysterious left foot still hidden. His hat was on the floor beside him, but he still held the parcel. So unnatural was his attitude as he nursed it on one arm, that I felt sure he was using it to conceal something. I noticed too, that his hat stood top-uppermost, and I wondered what the interior was like.

"By all means, tell your story in your own way," said I.

The story when told was as follows :—My visitor was the owner of an annuity of sixty pounds on his own life in the Caledonian Provident Corporation. For many years it had been paid to him regularly in Edinburgh, but when the last quarter fell due, the office refused to pay because some one had unrighteously given notice of an assignment of the annuity to himself. Thereupon the annuitant had journeyed to London, that being the place where the purchase of the annuity had been negotiated, and had demanded payment in King William Street.

The reverend gentleman had told his story with perfect clearness and moderation until it reached this point; but no sooner had he mentioned the London manager, than he broke off to denounce him in language of great majesty, poured forth in a voice and manner that recalled to memory the Evangelical Sabbaths of my boyhood.

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"Thereupon, I shook the dust of the place from off my feet, sir," he boomed, with an appropriate flourish of his disengaged arm; "and now I have come to you to ask, nay, to demand, that such proceedings may be taken, as will give me the protection to which the laws of my country entitle me."

The big grey eyes sparkled with indignation, and he wound up with another flourish of his arm. Unluckily, at this moment his left foot burst from its retirement and disclosed a dilapidated boot, with gaping jaws, through which five bare toes were visible. My astonished gaze drew his attention to what had happened. His eyes followed mine, and for a moment they dwelt upon the dilapidated boot as upon something strange and wonderful. Then he burst into a high-pitched, cackling laugh, and I saw the bare toes wriggle, as if rejoicing in their liberty. The spectacle was so odd, and his mirth so genuine and so infectious, that I found myself laughing violently.

"I wanted to look as smart as possible, so as to make a good impression," said my reverend client with a twinkling eye, when our merriment had subsided. "But you will see the thing through for me—won't you?" he added coaxingly.

"I'll do what I can. Hadn't you better put that parcel down?"

He complied with alacrity. The parcel had shielded from view a long rent, through which a considerable stretch of skinny arm was visible.

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"It doesn't do to show people that you wear no underclothing," he remarked airily ; "they seem to think it isn't respectable."

The absurdity of this popular delusion led him to indulge in another cackling laugh.

"Let us return to business," said I. "Who claims to hold this alleged assignment of your annuity ?"

"He's a man in Aberdeen."

"And he says you gave him an assignment ?"

"So I did, as a matter of fact."

"Then where's your grievance ?"

Mr. Angus smiled. "It was a little joke of mine. The annuity can't be assigned. It was granted as an unalienable personal provision of an eleemosynary character." He seemed to be quoting, more or less literally, the language of some legal document.

I was a little shocked at my client's want of principle ; and absurd though it may seem, I was, too, a little surprised.

"I don't see where the joke comes in," I observed.

I think it had been Mr. Angus's aim to lure me on to some expression of disapproval ; for as I said this in a voice that smacked of virtuous severity, his whole face lit up and his eyes danced joyfully.

"He was a money-lender," he explained.

"And he thought he was getting your annuity ?"

Mr. Angus nodded ; his eyes riveted upon my face and still twinkling.

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I am, I hope, a person of respectability and integrity, and of good credit in the neighbourhood in which I reside and carry on business. I hope, too, that I hold all fraud in loathing and contempt ; but I confess that as I stared at my new client and pondered over what he had said, the fact that the scarecrow sitting opposite had been too much for a money-lender, appealed to me as something irresistibly comical. "They say in Scotland, that no Jew can make a living in Aberdeen," thought I. My severity relaxed, and I laughed aloud.

"But if the matter is so clear, why don't the Corporation pay ?" was my next question.

"The people in Edinburgh said that they were consulting the London office ; so I thought it best to go to London without loss of time."

"Why ?" I asked.

Mr. Angus paused and rubbed his nose. "I thought I should like the trip," was his answer.

"When was it you last saw the Edinburgh people ?"

"The thirtieth of June—that was the day the money was due."

"But, Good Heavens, man !" I exclaimed, "do you know what to-day is ?"

"Somewhere about the twentieth of September ; isn't it ?"

"It's the twenty-fifth."

Mr. Angus seemed to attach no importance to the

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five lost days. "I walked most of the way, you see," he explained, with a glance at his boots. "There wasn't any great hurry; and, besides, I had no money."

"I am without a cure of souls just at present," he added, after taking another glance at his boots, and resting his eye for a moment on the torn sleeve.

There are some things so self-evident that the mere statement of them, offered in good faith, provokes a smile. Did Mr. Angus suppose that any sane person could associate him with the present or recent holding of a cure of souls? Not a bit of it! The man sat hugging himself in the enjoyment of his own joke, and wondering if I had seen it. Presently his mirth exploded in a chuckle that would not be suppressed, and this was followed by the high-pitched cackle of his laugh.

"He finds amusement," thought I, "in the contrast between what he is and what he ought to be. Perhaps he finds consolation, too—a mad world, my masters!"

"You haven't told me why the London office refused payment. You broke off to denounce the manager, you may remember," I remarked.

For a moment my client looked as if he intended to resume his denunciations, but he thought better of it.

"He insisted on my being identified; I who have drawn the annuity for over twenty years—and that after I had shown him my card."

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His tones thrilled once more with the reverberating indignation of the pulpit when he recalled this crowning infamy.

"Your card was no sort of an identification——" I began; and then I paused, for he was scanning my table as if in search of something.

"By-the-by, you have it," he said anxiously.

The card lay at my side. When I held it out, the owner almost snatched at it, and he at once proceeded to enwrap it in a piece of oilskin, which he produced from some invisible pocket in his clerical waistcoat.

"I should be lost without it," he exclaimed gaily as he stowed the little packet away; and this time I laughed with him.

"I'll see the London manager," I said. "This is the Long Vacation, and a walk to the City will do me good. You come back again this afternoon—say at about four! You will, perhaps, be glad to spend part of the time in lunching."

Mr. Angus had risen to his feet and had resumed possession of his hat and parcel. His left eyelid quivered at my mention of lunch. He understood me.

"Would a shilling——?" I continued hesitatingly, as I groped in a trouser-pocket.

"It would be the very thing," he answered eagerly.

As I handed over the coin, I felt a ridiculous regret that I had not mentioned half a crown; for there was in the man's eyes the same pitiful, forlorn

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look, which had stirred me in his favour at the beginning. I felt sure that it meant gratitude this time; and somehow, it seemed a return out of a proportion for the shilling which I had given him.

"By-the-by," I said, as he stood at the door of my room, "why did Mr. Mapleson-Smith refer you to me?"

I ought to have asked him this at the opening of our interview, but I had forgotten it.

He turned round and hesitated for a moment. "They said my case was too difficult for them, and I must go to you if I wanted it properly attended to."

"Who said that?" I demanded.

"It was the whole office, I think, except Mr. Smith himself. He was out of town, they said."

There was a tremor in Mr. Angus's voice, and it was evident that he felt some difficulty in preserving his gravity.

"I first told my story to the gentleman who opened the door," he continued, "and then he fetched another. They took a lot of interest in it, and while they were asking me questions, some more dropped in; and, at last, I think there must have been half a dozen there. And they all said the case was so difficult, I must go to you."

By this time I perfectly understood the joke that my neighbour's clerks had been playing.

"They seem to have given you excellent advice, anyhow," I remarked, smiling.

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The reverend gentleman's feelings found relief in a shriek of laughter.

"First rate!" he exclaimed. "First rate! I'm very much obliged to them."

"You don't happen to have such a thing as a needle and cotton?" he inquired, as he made a move to depart, and the glaring rent in his sleeve caught his eye. "Ah, well," he remarked, in answer to my shake of the head; "I dare say the gentlemen outside can assist me."

It was nearly an hour later that I prepared to start for King William Street, but when I had shut my door behind me, and was about to cross the den in which my shorthand clerk usually sits, and which lies between my sanctum and the outside office, I heard through the partition my new client's voice uplifted in shrill tones of mirth, and when it ceased, the loud laughter of two other persons followed.

"Peacock and Tommy Murchison seem to be having a good time with the reverend gentleman," was my inward comment; and I decided to see him off the premises before taking my departure.

I was about to summon Peacock and direct him to detain Mr. Angus no longer, when I caught a sound of movement in the outer office. Then I heard the door open, and after some highly jocular conversation on the landing, in which the voice of the stranger at the same high pitch of amusement, took

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the leading part, the door slammed, and my two henchmen returned to their seats.

"He's off," I thought; and presently from my window I saw him making his way across the Square towards Holborn. He was walking swiftly, twirling his parcel in the air. There was a springiness in his gait, quite wonderful at his time of life, and from certain movements of his head and shoulders, it was plain that he was laughing heartily.

I had not proceeded far on my way to the City before I got another glimpse of my new client. Hard by the corner of Gray's Inn Road, I came upon a woman selling walnuts—a comfortable dame, bulky of figure, and encased in many thicknesses of wearing-apparel. She was sitting on an upturned basket at the edge of the pavement, and snuggled up close beside her, sat the Reverend Patrick Angus, cracking and eating walnuts. His hat was on his lap, and the top was doing duty as a plate; his teeth served as nut-crackers. There he sat, beaming upon his companion, and pouring out, so far as his occupation would allow him, an unbroken stream of facetious conversation, while she, good soul, worked at the rent sleeve with needle and thread. As I watched him unobserved, I envied him his capacity for making friends.

"He's quite right," said the London manager, when I had laid before him the gist of my client's story; "we're bound to pay him, and no one else.

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The annuity can't be assigned or encumbered. We told him we'd stretch a point and pay him up here this time, if he'd only get himself identified. Our Edinburgh people know him; but we're bound to call for an identification."

"He didn't understand," said I.

"He wouldn't understand. I tried to explain, but he cut up rusty; and it ended in his going off in a devil of a rage. I advised him to consult a solicitor. Rum card, he is!" And the London manager shook with internal laughter.

"You don't doubt that he's your annuitant?"

"Good Lord, no! He's the man, right enough. I remember the annuity being purchased. That's more than twenty years ago. I was here then; but I never saw him before last Monday."

"That's three days ago," I exclaimed, in some surprise. "I thought he had just left you when he came to Gray's Inn."

The manager laughed again. "Just like him," he said. "One of our Edinburgh people was here last week, and he told me something about him."

"I hope his record isn't a very bad one."

"More his own enemy than anything else, I fancy."

"You're still willing to pay upon a proper identification."

"Oh yes! I shall be glad to let him have his

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money. I couldn't help liking the old chap. Got the better of a money-lender, too!"

"What sort of identification do you want?"

"If he knows anybody who has a banking account, that'll do. His friend can identify him, and the bank manager can identify his own customer; we know every bank manager in London."

Upon my return to Gray's Inn, I found an astonishing placard pinned to my office door: "RETURN IN FIVE MINUTES. PLEASE WAIT." The bold characters were in the handwriting of Mr. Thomas Murchison.

"This is disgraceful!" I ejaculated, as I let myself in with my key. "The Long Vacation is no excuse for leaving the place empty."

To make sure of catching Thomas on his return, I left open the door of my own room and of the small room before it.

"I will have a little talk to Tommy," said I.

Presently I heard the outer door unlocked, and I was about to strike my bell and summon the offender to my presence, when I became aware that he had brought Mr. Angus in with him.

"You're two hours early," said Tommy's genial voice; "the governor said you were coming at four. He won't be back till then."

"I thought you wouldn't mind my waiting here for a bit."

"Delighted—sit you down!"

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"Where's the other gentleman?" asked the visitor. "I don't know his name."

"Our Mr. Tubby! He's out at lunch. He or I have to keep on guard just now; everybody else is away holiday-making."

"I've all but finished my lunch," said Mr. Angus, comfortably, as he cracked a walnut. "May I offer you one?"

"Not for me, thanks. Don't bother to put the shells in your hat! Chuck 'em in the fireplace."

I heard the shells rattle on the fender.

"You have to read a lot for your profession," suggested the reverend gentleman.

"The reading part's easy enough. It's knowing what isn't in the books that makes a man a solicitor. That's the esoteric part of our profession, Mr. Angus; but I'll tell you just one thing. When the governor comes back from the City, Tubby will have to chalk down two cab fares in your bill——"

"But your governor said he'd walk," interrupted the client.

"That's just it. Any fool would know that a payment must be charged, if it was made; it's the knowing you must charge it, whether or no. You won't find that in the books."

"Why must you charge it?" The reverend gentleman was evidently much interested.

"It's the proper thing to do. You won't deny

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that the natural way for a solicitor to go from Gray's Inn to the City is in a cab—will you?"

Mr. Angus cracked a walnut before replying. "I don't say it isn't," he remarked.

"Well then! there's an old maxim that equity regards as done that which ought to be done, and the Judicature Act says that the rules of equity shall prevail. Now you see it; don't you?"

"It seems a strange sort of equity—to an outsider, I mean?" Mr. Angus said this with a chuckle, as soon as he had grasped the boy's meaning. "Don't the clients grumble a bit sometimes?"

"They don't know."

From the manner in which this was uttered, and the appreciative laugh with which it was acknowledged, I felt sure that Tommy had fortified his meaning by a wink.

"Do you suppose your governor will get my annuity?" asked the client, after a pause.

"He'll get it, right enough. The question is whether you'll get anything."

It seemed hard that Thomas Peverill Murchison should amuse himself by blackening my character in this wanton manner. His falsehood about the esoteric cab fares was bad enough, but this last innuendo was unspeakable. I tried to comfort myself by thinking that perhaps I should have done the same at his age; and on this followed the reflection that an eavesdropper deserved all that he got. But I made no move to disclose my presence.

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"Why shan't I get it, if he gets it?" asked Mr. Angus, in some astonishment.

"How about our bill of costs? You don't suppose an office like ours works for nothing?"

"I don't think it's usual," admitted the client; "but fifteen pounds is a lot of money."

"It's a mere nothing when you get into a solicitor's hands. Why, a good bit of it's gone already. Just you listen to Tubby's entries."

Mr. Murchison moved from his seat, and I heard the cover of some heavy book, probably my ledger, flung back upon Peacock's desk.

"It's no good your coming to look at it; it's in shorthand. I'll read it to you—*Bill of costs against the Rev. Patrick Angus, B.A.*—that's the heading! Now listen!—

£ s. d.

"September 25th.—Clerk's attendance upon you on your calling at my office and expressing a desire to see me at once upon important business, when you produced your visiting card, and after some conference and discussion, you were admitted to my presence—same charge as a letter 0 5 0

"Attending you in long conference, when you explained the nature of your business and I advised you thereon; and eventually you instructed me to make a special journey to the City on your behalf . . . 1 1 0

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£ s. d.

"Mr. Tubby and Mr. Murchison subsequently attending you, when you reported to them the result of the above interview, and gave them full particulars of the facts, which you had just disclosed to me, and of the advice which I had given you, and when you proceeded to apply for the loan of certain sewing materials, and same after a prolonged search could not be found, and you were advised to endeavour to obtain them elsewhere— engaged nearly an hour 2 2 0"

"Why two guineas?" demanded Mr. Angus. There was surprise in his voice, but no suggestion of complaint.

"You consulted two of us—Tubby and me."

This explanation seemed quite satisfactory to the client.

"Then it's lucky for me Mr. Tubby isn't in now," he remarked humorously, and he chuckled as if congratulating himself upon his good fortune.

"That fifteen pounds will be gone in no time, at that rate," he admitted, with another chuckle.

"It'll go like smoke."

"But perhaps they won't pay it, after all," suggested the annuitant, with a shriek of laughter, as a happy thought struck him.

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"That would make the governor sit up," was my traducer's comment, as he shut the book with another bang.

"I suppose you'll be glad to get the money," he resumed.

"I don't care so much about this one quarter, if it comes in all right afterwards; I can get through till the next quarter-day all right,—that's only a few days—but I can't go on for ever. It's the future I'm thinking of. A man of my age, Mr. Murchison, has got settled in his habits," he went on, in perfect good faith, and with unabated cheerfulness; "he's got into a groove, and I don't like the idea of going into the workhouse. I dare say I could make myself comfortable; but it's a restraint on an active man's liberty, and, to my mind, there's a certain indignity in having to give up your own clothes."

Here, I blush to say, Tommy spluttered. He tried to cover this lapse by blowing his nose; but Mr. Angus was not deceived, nor was he at all offended.

"They were all right when I started," he said, laughing.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to wear a suit of clothes that had been worn by somebody else?" hinted Tommy.

"These clothes weren't new when they came to me. I really can't remember when I last had any new ones."

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"We've got three or four bishops among our clients." Mr. Murchison's tone was full of meaning as he uttered this falsehood.

"You don't say so," returned Mr. Angus, with polite indifference; and he cracked another walnut.

"I was thinking," continued the youthful Ananias, "that if you cared to accept a suit of clothes, I might give you a note to one of them. I could write it on the office paper, you know. London's about your build."

"I shouldn't like to trouble him," said the other, gravely; and then he burst into a prolonged and joyous laugh.

"Bishops don't give away their clothes; who could wear them?" he exclaimed, still shaken by his merriment.

"But they must do something benevolent with 'em when they get a bit shabby."

Mr. Angus laughed again. "Perhaps the suffragans wear them out," was his suggestion.

"If I had to walk back to Scotland, I shouldn't be comfortable in a bishop's clothes," he resumed, his mirth still bubbling; "and it wouldn't be seemly; I might get put in prison."

"You can take it from me, there's nothing unlawful in it," asserted his legal adviser.

"And there's another thing. I had a touch of bronchitis at Durham, so I went into the infirmary there for a few days. If that happened on the way

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back, they wouldn't take me in if they thought I was a bishop. And suppose I found it convenient to lie up for a night as a casual ; what should I look like standing in the row outside the gate ? ”

Here, he laughed again, and even Tommy's gravity could hold out no longer. Under cover of their outbursts, I indulged in a quiet snigger on my own account. The whole escapade was a piece of boyish folly, and I ought to have nipped it in the bud ; but I had made no sign, and now my mental pictures of Mr. Angus cruising northward, clothed in a bishop's garb, were positively irresistible.

“ It seems almost a pity you don't tie up that left boot of yours ; it looks so shabby beside the other,” was Tommy's next remark.

“ I've done it up again and again,” protested the clergyman ; “ but it won't hold ; it will keep slipping off in front. It's some unfortunate peculiarity in my gait, Mr. Murchinson.”

He made this confession with great seriousness and something like a sigh.

“ I came across a sailorman at Barnet fair,” he continued ; “ but even that was a disappointment. He tied it so tight, I couldn't walk.”

“ You haven't tried wire—or a bit of hoop-iron ? ”

But that *fiasco* at Barnet was still rankling in the pilgrim's breast.

“ I shan't bother any more about it,” he said viciously. “ After all, it doesn't really matter ; I can

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get along all right. It isn't as if I wanted to run races." Mr. Angus had recovered his spirits by this time, and he finished up with a laugh.

At this stage of the proceedings the outer door opened, and I recognized Peacock's heavy footstep.

Mr. Murchison's imagination took a new flight. "Just in time!" was his greeting. "Mr. Angus is going to sing."

"There'll be no singing in this office while I'm in charge," retorted Peacock.

"But the governor won't be back yet awhile, and I'll keep an eye on the Square. Mr. Angus was telling us this morning about the singing he did on his way here. Don't you remember that supper after the funeral at Stamford?"

To my astonishment, the new client seemed more than willing to give a specimen of his powers.

"Of course if Mr. Tubby has any objection——" he began.

"But he doesn't object; do you, now?"

The temptation to hear the visitor sing was too strong for official virtue.

"I don't know that I do," was the answer.

"My voice isn't what it was," preluded Mr. Angus, "but there's a little song I wrote at Cambridge that might make you laugh. It's called 'The Exile of Highbury.' I wrote it to annoy one of the dons, whose rooms were near mine. And it used to annoy him very much," he went on, with a chuckle

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over the recollection of that annoyance, now fifty years old. "We used to sing it with the doors open. I wrote a lot of songs in those days." Then he cleared his throat, and piped up in a thin, clear treble—

"I was serving as assistant to a draper in the Strand,
When a parson said to me,
'The appropriate arenah for a man of your demeanah
Is a College of Divinithee.
You are toiling, you are moiling, and your food is very plain—
Cold meat and bread and tea ;
You can feast on steak and oysters in the venerable cloisters
Of the College of St. John at Highburree—

"I was very quickly favoured with an honourable berth:
I thanked my lucky stars,
And with joy my eyes were wetted, when I saw myself gazetted,
Archdeacon of the Nicobars.
And when I sailed triumphant for those islands far away,
I left upon the quay
A majestic deputation from that opulent foundation,
The College of St. John at Highbury—

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" But now that I am settled in the land of my desire
I curse my dignitess;
For what are rank and gaiters, if you have to live on 'taters
In the practice of economee ?
I am wearing to a shadow, for in days that are no more,
Whatever we might be—
Evangelical or Arian—we were never vegetarian
In the College of St. John at Highburree—

High-bur-ee !

There was fish and there was flesh in the comfortable mesh
Of the College of St. John at Highburree.

" I am burdened with a people who are turbulent and wild ;
And heathen though they be,
They are always argiefying; for their fervour is undying,
And they're better theologians than *me*.
I am worn and I am weary, I am sick and I am tired ;
And I long to cross the sea
To the very classic groves and the fishes and the loaves
Of the College of St. John at Highburree—

High-bur-ee !

O-h, I long to hide my mug in the hollow of a jug
At the College of St. John at Highburree ! "

During the progress of the song, Mr. Murchison had now and again, thrown in a little assistance, and Peacock, as I afterwards discovered, had jotted down the words in shorthand. At the close, the applause of both hearers was so enthusiastic, that before resuming his seat, the venerable songster indulged in a brief double-shuffle. I could follow the figures of this dance with tolerable accuracy; for the scrape of one foot on the oilcloth was clear and rasping, while the movement of the other was subdued and muffled. That was the string bandage.

" Why was the gentleman annoyed ? " asked Peacock, who was evidently puzzled.

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“He had been a student there at one time, and he wasn’t proud of it.”

“But it’s well spoke of in the neighb’hood; I come by there every morning,” resumed Peacock, still all at sea. “And I never heard it was such a place for eating and drinking.”

“It might have been anything, for all I knew, or cared, about it,” said the poet, chuckling. “I was young, my dear Mr. Tubby, and young men at college; they’re not like Mr. Murchison. They haven’t the responsibilities of a profession on their shoulders. Hee, hee, hee !”

“I must be going to Theobalds Road,” announced Peacock; “I shan’t be more than twenty minutes.”

“I will come with you, if you will allow me,” said the visitor, eagerly. “A little walk will help to pass the time; and I think, Mr. Tubby, a leetle, l-e-e-tle drop of gin and water will do neither of us any harm.”

“Not me, thank you !”

Peacock’s bluntness was lost upon the reverend gentleman.

“We’ll talk about that outside,” he remarked gaily.

Two minutes after their departure, I heard the outer door slammed with great violence, and before another half minute had elapsed, I saw Tommy racing across the Square in the direction of Holborn.

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"Thank goodness! He wants a 'special,'" said I gratefully; "I'll let myself into the gardens and have a cigar."

My second interview with Mr. Angus opened stormily. As soon as I had laid before him the result of my mission, he flew into a tantrum, and vowed that, come what might, he would not submit to be identified. At one time he was even disposed to take high ground, and to hint that unless legal proceedings were instituted forthwith, he must avail himself of the services of some other solicitor. I was very gentle with him; for I could see that he had expected me to come back with the money in my pocket, and that the disappointment, working, perhaps, upon a leetle, l-e-e-tle drop of gin and water, had made him fractious. When, by a judicious mixture of firmness and banter, I had managed to bring him to reason, it appeared that the matter could be arranged without difficulty, for he was acquainted with a responsible person in the City, who, if get-at-able, would gladly identify him to the manager's satisfaction.

"Then you'll take your friend there the first thing to-morrow morning!" said I.

"Won't you come too?"

"What good should I be?"

"They won't pay me direct, after seeing you."

"They won't pay anybody else."

He pondered over this assurance, with his head a

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little on one side, and when he next spoke, I detected a crafty twinkle in his eye.

"If it must be done, it must, and I must wait till to-morrow," he said indifferently. "But it's a sad loss of time—a sad loss of time," he added; his irritation peeping out once again.

"You took it pretty easy, coming from Edinburgh," I hinted.

"It was such beautiful weather after I got across the Border," he pleaded, with an odd, humorous smile.

"And it's three days since you went to King William Street."

He received this with one of his shrill, cackling laughs.

"That wasn't my fault," he exclaimed. "I couldn't find a solicitor."

"But you didn't go to my neighbour till this morning."

"I went to five before I went to him. They wouldn't even hear my story. I was really getting quite disheartened, especially after being sent away downstairs."

He checked himself in his merriment as he made this confession, and sat silent for a minute, staring at the dilapidated boots.

"But it was a rare stroke of luck, their sending me here," he said suddenly; and, looking up into my face, he laughed again.

"Don't be hard on the manager," I remarked at

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parting. "He seemed a little hurt by what you said on Monday."

The delicious suggestion that Mr. Angus was a person to be held in awe by one of the Corporation's most prominent officials worked like a charm.

"I must make him an apology," he cried, with a beaming countenance.

As I bade him good-bye, I slipped a florin into his hand. I did not expect to see him again, and I thought that I should sleep none the worse that night, if I knew that he had a roof over him.

On the afternoon of the day following I was passing along Verulam Buildings towards my office, when suddenly I came upon Peacock and the old gentleman proceeding briskly in the opposite direction. A clay pipe, about an inch in length, was between the client's lips, and he seemed to be bubbling over with mirth and loquacity as he jigged along, hanging on to the arm of his stouter companion, and swinging the newspaper parcel to and fro. Peacock recognized me with a blush and a very embarrassed grin, but the other was too much engrossed with his own outpourings to have any eyes for things around him. I was in no mood to be detained just then; and as I slipped by I was able, by means of a ferocious scowl, to make Peacock understand that Mr. Angus must not be warned of my proximity. Looking back from the shelter of the tunnel, I saw the two figures and the waving parcel pass out into the Gray's Inn Road.

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"Some new difficulty—friend out of town!" thought I, and I felt half-inclined to wish that I had followed the example of those five other solicitors.

Mr. Murchison was no longer on guard. The office boy had come back that morning, and it was he who let me in. I did not trouble myself to make inquiry as to the object of the reverend gentleman's call.

"Is it that old chap again?" I asked irritably, when, later in the afternoon, Peacock came into my room.

"No, sir; he's on his way to Scotland," was the unexpected answer.

"Gone?" I exclaimed, and I looked with astonishment into my henchman's grinning face.

"Yes, sir; he got the annuity this morning, and he came here to let you know, and to thank you for what you'd done for him. He wanted a bill of costs, too." Here Peacock grinned again.

I really felt conscience-stricken. "One had no business to suppose he wouldn't come," said I, thinking aloud.

"When he said so much about our costs and paying you back three shillings, I thought I should be following your wishes, sir, if I told him it wasn't to be thought of," continued Peacock.

"Quite right," said I. "The whole business was nothing but a joke, and a very good joke it was, too."

"When you came across us, I was just taking

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him to a boot-shop. Mr. Murchison and I had persuaded him to get a pair of boots.

"Did you wait to see him fitted?"

Peacock grinned from ear to ear. "I don't think I could have, sir, if he hadn't had any socks on. Luckily, Mr. Murchison had an extra pair in his drawer, and we made him put 'em on. They were rather a bright pattern, and when he saw 'em on his feet, he was that pleased, he danced up and down parading them. He fairly made me laugh."

"He's a queer fish," said I.

"I'm afraid he was a bit unsteady even when he was a young man," said Peacock, gloomily. "He was saying yesterday, he made up comic songs when he was at College—strange games for a gentleman studying for the Church."

"But, after all, he came back to pay his bill."

This was touching my henchman upon a very tender spot. "There's many a worse!" he admitted.

"And he ain't quite crack-brained, either," he went on. "He knows what he is, right enough. As soon as he got the money this morning, he went straight to King's Cross and took his ticket. Then he came on here. He was hardly inside the door when he fished it out of the lining of his hat. "Got my ticket, Mr. Tub—Peacock!" says he, as if he'd done something wonderful.

Poor old chap! I remembered those fictitious items, and I understood now why he had looked so

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crafty when he heard that the annuity would be paid direct to him ; and once again my conscience smote me.

“ Did he really ? ” was all I said.

“ He likes to fling his money about when he’s got any. After we left the boot-shop, he wanted to give me half a sovereign. I advised him to put it in the Savings Bank, and he nearly had a fit. I didn’t see anything to laugh at.”

“ Nothing at all—a very feasible suggestion,” said I, chortling inwardly.

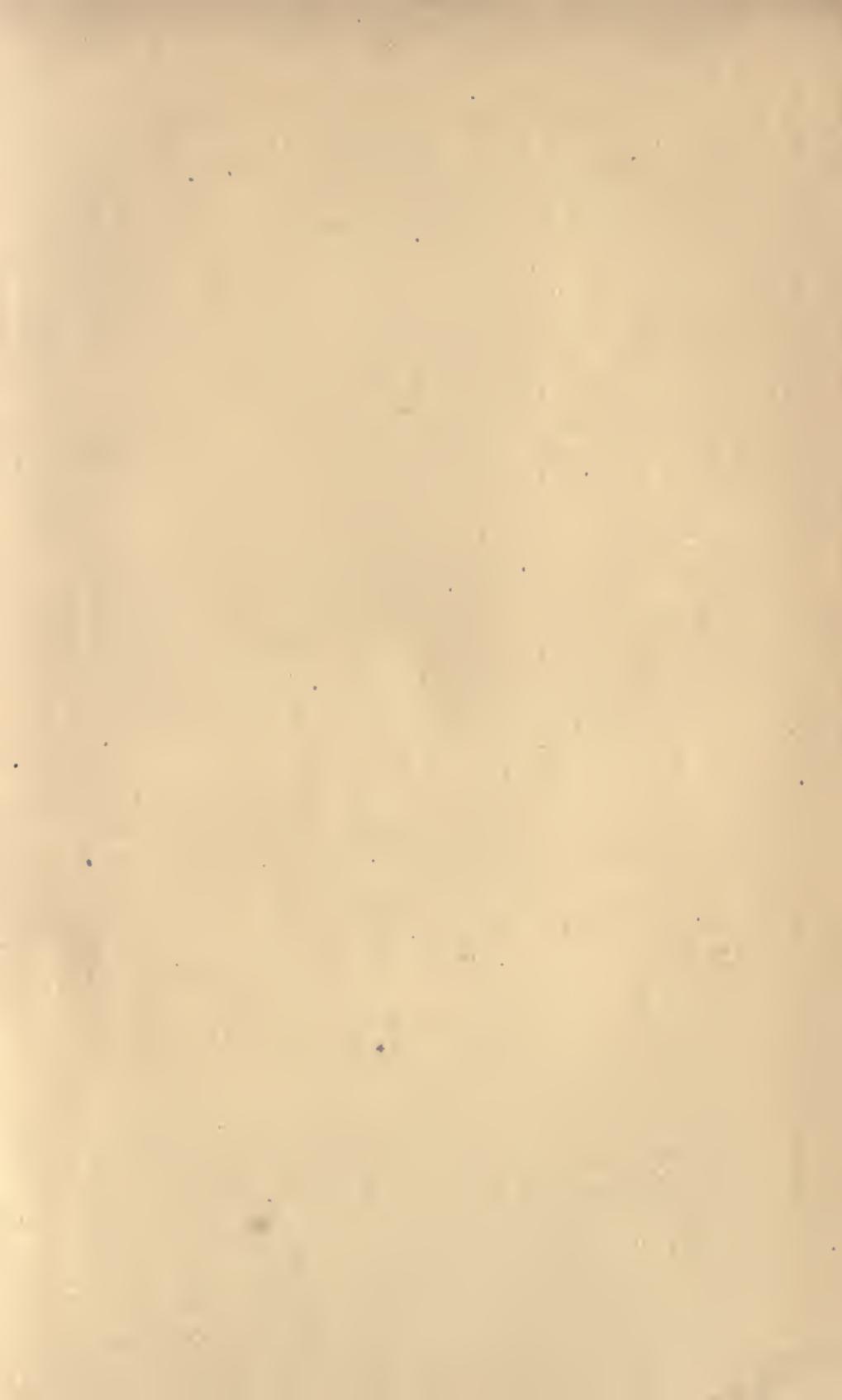
“ But he made me take the half-crown Mr. Murchison gave him yesterday. He knew it wouldn’t be any good to offer it him direct. He said, young men were often short of money ; and that set him off laughing again. And he wanted to come back and bid you good-bye. I told him he’d lose his train if he did, and he said that didn’t matter at all ; so I thought the best thing I could do was to stick to him till I’d seen him off.”

Peacock had told his tale ; but, before leaving the room, he summed matters up in his stolid, responsible way.

“ It’s a sad thing, sir, to see a clergyman brought down to what he is ; but you can’t help feeling glad-like he’s so happy.”

THE END

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